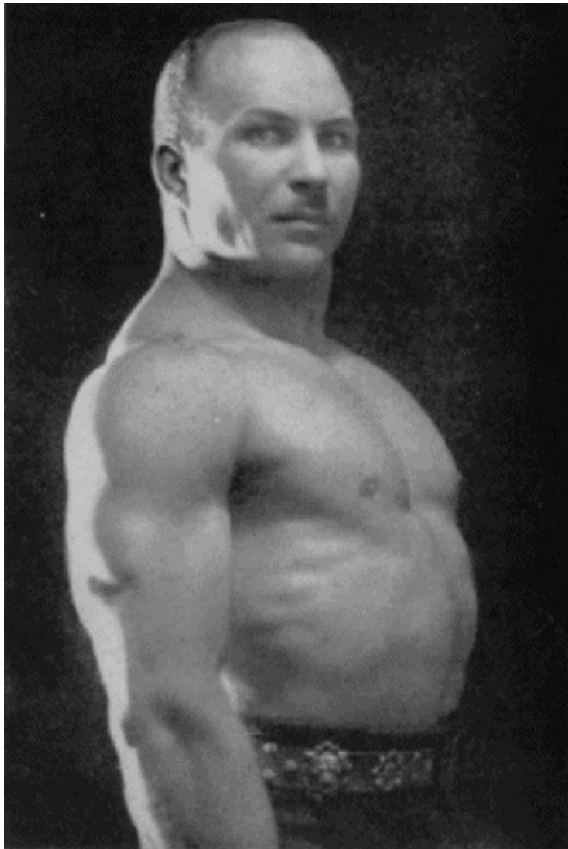


THE AMAZING SAMSON

ALEXANDER ZASS

THE AMAZING SAMSON

By Alexander Zass



THE AMAZING SAMSON

POSES TO SHOW THE “THICKNESS” OF HIS CHEST – INCIDENTALLY A MASSIVE ARM AND NECK.

THE AMAZING SAMSON

AS TOLD BY HIMSELF

WITH A FOREWORD BY

W.A. PULLUM 9-ST. CHAMPION WEIGHT-LIFTER OF THE WORLD

THE SAMSON INSTITUTE

LONDON

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The exercises and advice contained within this book is for educational and entertainment purposes only. The exercises described may be too strenuous or dangerous for some people, and the reader should consult with a physician before engaging in any of them.

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The Amazing Samson originally published in 1926

Modern Reprint Edition

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PUBLISHERS' NOTE

I N presenting to the physical culture public the lifestory of “The Amazing Samson” – a remarkable narrative of a remarkable man – the Publishers have felt that such a story would be incomplete without some mention was made of other famous strong men who, from time to time, have appeared in this country, and in their selection of Mr. W. A. Pullum as chronicler they consider they have discovered the right man.

Mr. Pullum's supplements to this book are, undoubtedly, among the most noteworthy of his contributions to physical culture literature. In “Strong Men Over the Years” he has succeeded in compiling a record of strong men and their feats as entertaining as it is reliable, whilst his invited commentary on Samson's astounding performances and methods is both masterly and singularly generous.

In addition to his literary ability, Mr. Pullman is himself an athlete of considerable distinction, having won fifteen Championships at weight-lifting, fifty gold medals, and created and broken close on two hundred official world's and British weight-lifting records. Further to these personal successes, he has trained a great number of strong men, most of the British weight-lifting champions and record holders of the past fourteen years having graduated as his pupils.

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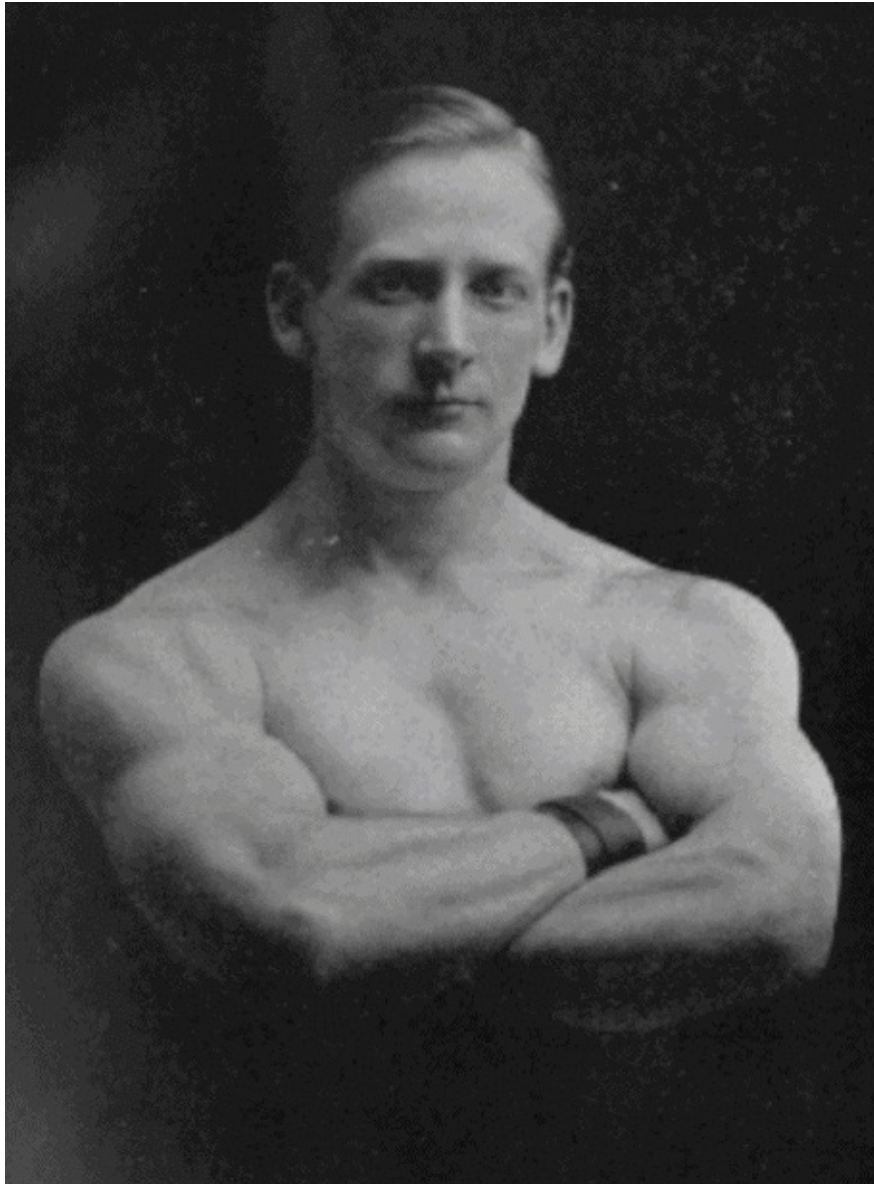
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W. A. PULLUM.

Author of "Strong Men Over the Years," also "WeightLifting Made Easy and Interesting," – "How to Use a Bar-Bell," "Weight-Lifting Whys and Wherefores," "How to Become Strong," "Weight-Lifting as a Science," "How to Give a Strong Show," "The Romance of Weight-Lifting," "Feats of Famous Strong Men," etc.

FOREWORD

STRONGMEN OVER THE YEARS

BY W. A. PULLUM

Winner of 15 British Weight-Lifting Championships, 50 Gold Medals, and Holder of 192 World's and British Records. Nine-Stone Champion Weight-Lifter of the World.

I

R IGH T from the days of remote antiquity, interest amounting to fascination has invested the personality of the strong man. No matter what the age, no matter where the country, round the man of great physical strength has been thrown a glamour which holds the imagination in thrall. For man, however intellectual he may have become compared with his primeval forebears – however much the habits and customs of his present mode of life tend to make him occasionally forget the fact – still remains an animal under the skin. And because this is irrevocably so, the display resplendent of what proverb has rightly described as his glory will always strike in his breast a responsive chord – will always cause the blood to flow a little quicker through his views, impelled by the primitive urge. That is, if he is at all constructed true to type; if he is indeed a faithful replica of what his sex was ordained to be.

Both history and legend feature the strong man prominently. Mythology also, that never-failing source of fruitful inspiration to the painter and the sculptor, is largely built upon his fabled powers. But extensive though the scope afforded by the combination, into the dim past I do not propose to dip in order to discover characters for my story. All my figures have existed within the period of my own recollection. Concerning their powers, therefore, I can speak authoritatively – their feats recount in terms of strict exactitude.

The story that I have to tell, tough minus entirely the element of fiction, remains, nevertheless, an amazing one. Indeed, unaccompanied by the assurance just given, the lay reader might well be pardoned for declining to accept as gospel much of what is to be set down for his edification. Yet, really, there is no need for him to be the least bit sceptical. Wonderful as are the feats which will be related, equally wonderful feats are being performed at the present time under conditions as open as the light of day. But I will not anticipate, or my narrative will be in danger of commencing at the wrong place.

Midway between thirty and forty years ago, a GermanAmerican strong man (sometimes described as an Alsatian), calling himself “Sampson,” was appearing at the old Royal Aquarium, London, in company with another athlete, also obviously of foreign importation, who rejoiced in the name of “Cyclops.” The latter, by the way, was described as a pupil of Sampson, who was giving a show then of its kind unique. Spice was added to the entertainment which the two provided by the announcement that Sampson would present £1,000 to any man in the world who could come forward and duplicate his feats. But munificent though the offer, no one with the requisite amount of nerve and ability came forward. And, consequently, the career of this confident herculean performer maintained the even tenor of its way.

Meanwhile, on the Continent, a young man had seen visions conjured up quite early in his life come true! In boyhood days a weak and sickly youth, he was regarded as the butt, thumping and kicking post of his fellow scholars and other lads of the neighbourhood. He found the life unpleasant, naturally, but no champion to rescue him. So he stayed indoors as much as possible, and read books.

In one of these he read that the practice of physical culture would make him strong. He wondered! Would it make him strong enough to turn the tables on his persecutors? Diligently he studied, practised and experimented, and as time went on he found that it was even so. Furthermore, he found that he had, all unconsciously, stumbled on a means of livelihood, for in the process of practice and experiment he had cultivated a figure that was coveted by sculptors and showmen.

Following the trail of these, he visited Italy, where, one day, he went bathing. On emerging from the sea on this particular occasion, his Greek-god-like proportions attracted the attention of an English visitor a certain Mr. Aubrey Hunt, A.R.A., who expressed, with his admiration for the bather's figure, an earnest desire to paint it. The bather was nothing loth – and so trod the path of destiny.

While posing and painting proceeded, together they chatted. And during the course of their conversation, Mr. Hunt told his model of the strong man, Sampson; graphically described his feats – and the interest that these had aroused; and, finally, told him of the £ 1,000 which Sampson was offering to any man who could duplicate these feats.

The model was interested – particularly in the £ 1,000 – and ventured the opinion that he was the man to collect the money. Mr. Hunt was interested in turn, and gave the subject of his canvas a letter of introduction to Mr. John Fleming, then manager of the National Sporting Club. So he was who to prove himself the greatest showman of all strong men came to London – unheralded. And with his coming arrived Sampson's Nemesis – for the invader was none other than the now famous Eugen Sandow.

As he did not then speak English (his various conversations with Mr. Aubrey Hunt had always been carried on in French), he sought out an interpreter and guide, and was so fortunate as to forgather with one Professor Attila, whose chief mission in life, it seems, was the discovery and subsequent exploitation of strong men. Attila was by way of being a strong man himself, but was nothing near big enough to tackle Sampson on his own account. He jumped at Sandow, therefore, visualising – correctly, as it happened – the financial possibilities which such an association offered.

Arriving at the N.S.C., Sandow was greeted with courtesy, but hardly with enthusiasm. He found the members politely sceptical as to his ability to lower Sampson's colours, and nothing would alter their attitude until Sandow gave them an unrehearsed exhibition of his powers by lifting a very hefty member of the assembly bodily from the floor and depositing him on an adjacent table.

This feat convinced Mr. Fleming, who was still further satisfied when Sandow stripped off in the gymnasium. All agreed that, if looks were any indication of ability, Waterloo day had really arrived for the Aquarium exhibit; and a few evenings later, Sandow, accompanied by Mr. Fleming and other members of the Club, took a box at the Aquarium, waited till Sampson made his nightly challenge of £1,000 – and promptly accepted it!

Sampson, who presumably had never expected his gauntlet to be picked up, at once

became very excited. Also, he immediately commenced to hedge. Who was the stranger, anyway? What credentials did he possess which would entitle him to a trial of strength with “The Worlds Strongest Man”? Let him prove himself by a contest with the less redoubtable Cyclops! Then, in the event of the stranger proving successful – and only then – it would be quite time to talk about a match with him. And to test the mettle of this presumptuous challenger, £100 would be given him if he succeeded in defeating Cyclops. These were Sampson's terms now that he was brought to bay, and from them not one iota would he deviate.

Neither Mr. Fleming nor Sandow, however, was at all agreeable to this! Primarily, they had come trailing that £ 1,000. But now, in view of this “red herring,” they were after Sampson's blood, and not inclined to present him with any avenue of escape. They recognised that beneath the showman's bombast was the knowledge that his bluff was called, and they determined to hang on.

Obviously no other way out of the dead-lock, the Aquarium management stepped in, and eventually conciliated the visitors. To accomplish this result, they personally guaranteed the payment of the £100 offered for a duplication of Cyclop's feats. And further, they guaranteed that if Sandow could win this, they would see to it that Sampson was made to toe the line.

All preliminaries settled, the N.S.C. party invaded the stage. Sandow, by the way, had prepared for the occasion by donning a “property” dress suit, under which he was wearing an athletic costume. The reason for this was that he could not be sure that Sampson, or one of his entourage, might not recognise him, as by this time both his figure and his face were well known on the Continent. And to strengthen still further his incognito, he also wore a monocle, the retention of which in place caused him far more trouble than he was to experience later with the feats that Cyclops set him.

The appearance presented by Sandow as he made his way on to the stage was not such as to give Sampson any cause of trepidation. As a matter of fact, the latter appeared to have completely regained his customary aplomb, and was moreover quite derisive. And as, at that moment, Sandow stumbled over one of the weights on the stage and dropped and lost his monocle, the mocking remarks of the challenged one found a ready echo among the spectators, who ranged themselves amlost to a man under Sampson's banner. Their mood underwent a considerable alteration, however, as Sandow dramatically whipped off the garb that hitherto had concealed his superb physique. Sampson also sobered down immediately, and began to look more than a little apprehensive, as well as becoming quite voluble in his asides to the equally perturbed Cyclops.

The latter, after these aides had finished – and probably stimulated to some extent by them – then came forward to demonstrate the first test, which was the lifting of a dumb-bell. This weight Cyclops placed overhead with one hand by employing the method later to be described in weight-lifting circles as the “Bent Press.” Sandow followed, pulled the bell in to the shoulder with one hand just as easily as Cyclops had

done, and steadily pushed it overhead without resorting to the method favoured by his opponent. The weight of the bell was announced to be 160 lbs.

As every reader who understands anything about the technique of weight-lifting will realise, Sandow's performance was a much more difficult one than that of Sampson's pupil. It was not an exact duplication, of course. But then there had been no stipulation save that Sandow should lift the same weights as Cyclops. The question of style had never arisen. Therefore, it was jointly agreed that the first test had been passed satisfactorily by the challenger – and in such a way, it may be said in passing, that proved conclusively he was the stronger man.

Test number two saw Cyclops lift with both hands and jerk overhead a barbell weighing 220 lbs. Eugen experienced no difficulty in following this feat and, scorning the easier method again, slowly pushed the bell to arm's length. A really good performance, this, on Sandow's part, though far from a record today.

The third test was what is technically described as a “Press on Back” of a barbell weighing in the neighbourhood of 250 lbs. Both men got through this comfortably, and then, as Cyclops did not seem capable of setting any more problems for Sandow to solve, Mr. Fleming concluded that the ordeal was over. So he asked, first, that the £100 should now be forthcoming; secondly, that Sampson should now step up and fulfil his part of the contract.

This wily showman, however, had other ideas. He and his pupil, so he explained at tedious length, were really and truly strong men. There was nothing of the “make believe” variety about them. Strength included endurance; and the question of joint merit could not, and must not, be decided in such brusque fashion. Cyclops and Sandow must start all over again. The lifts must be repeated – and re-repeated – until one of the two contestants failed. Then – well, the spectators would soon see that Sandow was not the equal, let alone the superior, of Cyclops.

This manœuvre failed to secure the slightest approbation. No one present wanted to be bored to death; and again, no one wanted to run the risk of having to wait a week for a decision. So the Aquarium management proposed that Cyclops should set Sandow one more test. And then, if Sandow got through this as successfully as he had the others, the £100 would certainly be forthcoming.

All agreeing – Sampson, it must be said, though, under protest – the final test was set. This was somewhat in the nature of what is known in weight-lifting circles as a “Dead Lift.” A large, flat stone, weighing something in the neighbourhood of 400 lbs., was brought forward, and on this three 56-lb. weights were placed. A cord was then passed under the stone and knotted tight. Cyclops, standing on two chairs, straddling the stone, then essayed with one hand to lift this weight combination clear of the floor. After two failures, he removed one of the ½ cwts., then succeeding in the attempt. At Sandow's request, however, the third “fifty-sixer” was replaced, and, at his first attempt, the challenger lifted the full combination. The £100 had been won, fairly and squarely – and Sampson was called upon to fulfil his bargain.

A remarkable scene followed! Sampson had volumes to remark, hair and moustache to tear at, frenzied gesticulations to make, and not a few tears to shed. After a while, though, he calmed down sufficiently to plead the strong excitement under which he was labouring – the “*crise des nerfs*” consequent on the defeat of his pet pupil – and the unfairness of expecting him to enter on a test that might imperil his whole career when obviously so mentally unfitted for it.

His appeal touched the sympathetic managerial heart, who visualised, at once, that here was meat for the newspapers. Meat that could judiciously be converted into a most succulent box-office feast. They had already done well, since the patrons of every other sideshow in the building, hearing what was going on, had swarmed into Sampson's theatre, packing it almost to suffocation. So far the management had come out very well. They would be foolish indeed if they missed the harvest that promised to follow.

Sampson's appeal, consequently, found strong support. The sporting instincts of Mr. Fleming and Sandow were addressed – successfully. A cheque for £100 was paid over, and the following Saturday night appointed for the struggle that was to decide whether Sampson should continue to reign supreme, or yield his crown to the stranger

II

CYCLOPS out of the running, Sandow went home to think, and to consult with Professor Atilla. A big trial was coming, and it was essential that no point should be missed. For, you see, both the victor and his prompter had been using their eyes. They had paid more than one visit to Sampson's display, and had noted two things, both, as they guessed, of real importance. The first was that one of Sampson's favourite feats was the bursting of chains by the contraction of his biceps. The second was that Sandow's forearms were considerably bigger than Sampson's.

When it came to the test, they suspected that Sampson would produce his own chains. These Sandow would probably discover could not be passed over his forearms, and, consequently, could not be submitted to the flexion of his biceps. There would, therefore, be no test! Sampson, as a result, would no doubt, assert that his challenger was dodging the test – and claim a victory. The German-American was popular; the spectators might miss the real point; and Sampson, by appealing to their sense of fair play, might succeed in bluffing his way out. Here was a potential danger against which it would be decidedly advisable to take adequate precautions. Some way to circumvent this possible contingency must most certainly be found.

So Sandow and Atilla did a little detective work, and discovered the maker of Sampson's chains in a small street of Leicester Square. They explained the dilemma they were in and following the example that the other side had been setting them so persistently, made an appeal to the chain-maker's sporting instincts. They found him sympathetic, and eventually extracted from him a promise that he would make them a set of chains similar in all respects but one to those he supplied to Sampson himself,

the one variation being that the chains should be of a circumference which would enable them to be passed over Sandow's forearm. Furthermore, he promised, in view of the unique circumstances which encompassed the whole affair, that he would definitely attend the Aquarium on the all-important Saturday, and, if necessary, make a declaration such as would satisfy every impartial auditor.

The eventful night arrived! Sandow, this time accompanied by quite a retinue of highly interested sportsmen – and having made a few arrangements with a view to possible happenings – set out for the Aquarium. That building was packed at, up till then, unheard-of charges, as much as 50 guineas apiece having been paid for some of the seats. But there were many more outside the building than in it! So many, in fact, that the entrances were unapproachable. All the “house full” signs were out; the doors were closed; and it was impossible to fight a way close enough to inform anyone that though *Hamlet* might be staged, the Prince of Denmark might remain “a voice without” (and an inaudible one, at that).

The party, therefore, journeyed round to the stage-door. This it was possible to approach, but violent hammering and vicious kicks failed to secure any answer. The door-keepers and others were all on the stage waiting for Sandow. The hour fixed for the match had struck! Obviously there was only one way in, and Sandow took it, smashing his way through the door.

The scene within baffles description, so I will not attempt it. Sampson, prematurely exultant in the belief that his rival had funked the ordeal, received a shock of very high voltage when the challenger and his friends made their dramatic entry on to the stage. For some time pandemonium reigned! Eventually, however, some semblance of order was restored, the scene was “set,” and the fight was “on.” I should mention here that three judges for the great test had been nominated and agreed upon. These were the Marquis of Queensberry, Lord de Clifford, and Professor Atkinson, of Park Lane, the predecessor of the present world-famous Professor Barker.

Sampson commenced operations by producing a wire cable, one inch in diameter. This he placed around his chest and, after deflating his lungs, drew the ends together and knotted them. Holding the ends of the cable one in each hand, he then, by expanding his chest and the latissimus dorsi muscles of his back, snapped the cable. Tremendous applause greeted the successful termination by Sampson of feat number one.

The cable was then re-spliced, after which Sandow was called upon to duplicate the feat. There now arose for the challenger a difficulty that he had not foreseen, for the act of re-splicing had made the cable shorter. And as a result, Sandow found that, after knotting it as Sampson had done, only sufficient of the cable stood away from the knots as would permit him taking hold of each end with the tips of his thumb and fingers. While he was puzzling as to how he would retain his hold when making the necessary strain, Sampson noted his discomfiture and openly exulted. An unwise proceeding, since it nerved Sandow to make a sudden, supreme effort. Snap! went the cable, and Sandow had passed the first test triumph.

Then came the episode of the chains! Sampson, taking the glistening steel loops in his hands, first slipped one over his right arm and, forcefully flexing his biceps, broke it with apparent ease. He then broke another on his left arm, after which he placed two chains round his right upper arm. Obviously with great difficulty, he broke these simultaneously; and, in so doing, doubtless thought that he had presented Sandow with a task impossible of achievement.

A duplicate set of chains was then passed to Sandow; but these were found too small to pass farther than the middle of his forearms – just as he had suspected that they would. He then produced his own set; but to the use of these Sampson would not agree, and in this objection he was, at first, supported by the judges. These held, as Sandow quite expected they would, that the terms of the test called for a duplication of Sampson's performance; and this, apparently, was not a duplication. They were quite unanimous on this point, and their unwavering attitude on the matter made it appear that a deadlock had arrived.

As Sandow was not able to speak English, Mr. Fleming and Professor Attila stepped into the breach and explained how, when and why Sandow's chains had been procured, intimating also that the maker of these chains had promised to be present. Accordingly, that gentleman was called upon by the judges, whereupon he came forward from the body of the hall on to the stage. So sensationally confronted, Sampson had to admit his identity; and on the craftsman's asseveration that the chains with which he had supplied Sandow only differed in circumference from those that Sampson had broken, the judges recognised Sandow's contention as perfectly legitimate and allowed him to proceed.

Disdaining to strike the exaggerated postures indulged in by Sampson during his execution of the same feat, Sandow first broke the chains singly on each of his upper arms, and then the double band of linked steel on his right arm. With eyes almost starting from his head, Sampson witnessed the astounding performance. Then, no longer able to control his feelings, he rushed lamenting from the stage to the seclusion of his dressing-room, wherein he locked himself – presumably to bewail the sadness of his lot and the relentless cruelty of fate.

The match thus came to an abrupt conclusion! Sampson could not be tempted out again; and although it had been generally understood that Sandow would be asked to duplicate several more of Sampson's feats, it was obvious, since the chagrined showman refused to emerge from the shelter of his dressing-room, that the contest must terminate. The judges, therefore, had no other alternative but to declare Sandow the winner. Unfortunately, however, there had been no previous agreement that the management should pay over the £1,000 for which the challenger had competed, and which he had so indisputably won. Sampson was, and remained, unapproachable. So the full sum of money was never paid.

I do not suppose for one moment that this rankles sorely in Sandow's memory! He certainly had to go without the major portion of the prize on which he had so fondly

counted, yet, by his victory, he won a fame far greater than he had ventured to anticipate. For he had been wise! The arrangements he had made – reference to which I made earlier on – were for the placing of weights and other strong man stage effects within easy reach of the theatre. By Sampson quitting in high dudgeon, the spectators had had their unique entertainment curtailed, so when Sandow stepped voluntarily into the breach and gave them an impromptu show of his own, they extended to him a welcome which, hearty though it was, nevertheless was only a small indication of what in the near future awaited him. And it is interesting to recall that the new star offered Sampson £ 1,000 in turn – or, rather, those who were representing him did – if he could duplicate any one of the conqueror's feats. But the offer was as the seeds that fell on rocky ground.

His show over, Sandow left the stage a made man, inundated with offers of music hall engagements, fulfilling which he proved that he was one of the greatest performers of all time. And at the conclusion of his stage appearances, he set sail on the career that he had mapped out for himself as an instructor in physical culture, and the founder of a new health system.

I have dwelt at some length on the Sampson-Sandow drama because it is the first competitive meeting between strong men of which there are any reliable details. Also, because from it sprang the entire physical culture movement, and the art and science of weight-lifting as we know it in this country to-day. It was, perhaps, neither the most interesting nor the most romantic episode in the history of the game; but it was the first – the stepping-stone to greater things. Sandow was fated in his time to experience a reversal of fortune at the hands of Hercules McCann, who came and went so mysteriously. The story of this match, and the split hairs on which the verdict swung, makes interesting reading. So into this narrative, shortly, I propose to fit it.

III

SAMPSON deposed from his pedestal, Sandow found himself a much sought after, flattered, and rewarded man. His hour, indeed, had struck; and, literally speaking, everything that he touched turned to gold. The most exclusive doors were thrown wide open to him, men and women of title fervently associating themselves with his ideas and ideals. Managers of music halls clamoured for his appearance, offering to secure it at most tempting terms – princely sums, which, even in this day of maximum figures, would seem to border on the fantastic. (I exempt entirely, of course, modern boxing champions, as the estimated and accepted values of this section of the athletic fraternity have long since merited that description.)

Sandow, however, it must be conceded, gave full value for money, his act being a gorgeous piece of setting, the conception of a master-brain. His was a display of strength adorned with grace and artistry; a spectacle of lavish splendour that made an appeal to the senses as well as the instincts; a refined presentation of physical power that has never been attempted by any other man in the business. King of showmen; an artist to his finger-tips; the whole world at his feet in his day – such was Eugen

Sandow. And even now his star has not waned! Dimmed somewhat, perhaps, by the passage of years, but what little lustre it may have lost by that process is more than compensated by the romantic glamour with which even the present generation continues to invest him; tributary homage which generations yet unborn will render, so great is the prestige of the man.

With Sandow cresting the flood-tide of success, came the inevitable imitators; and, the country in a receptive frame of mind, the boom in strong shows had started. Attracted by visions of easy money, formidable looking inhabitants of the Continent descended on these shores, labels attached to them which would seem to indicate that they knew mythology as well as they evidently did the inborn fondness of the British public for the foreign imported article. And side by side with these alien invaders marched muscular giants of our own isles; all imbued with a common desire; all pursuing feverishly the same elusive will-o'-the-wisp: the fame and wealth that were Sandow's.

Among the latter were two who hailed from Birmingham, known professionally as Hercules and Samson McCann, differing nowise from the rest of the fraternity, inasmuch as they were passing good at certain speciality feats, and challenged all and sundry to duplicate these feats. Sandow, who, of course, was specially singled out in the McCanns' *defi*, retaliated with a counter-challenge; but, for quite a while, nothing more tangible resulted than a considerable inflation of claims on each side. Then, with dramatic suddenness, one of the brothers picked up Sandow's gauntlet; and, after the usual skirmishing inseparably connected with events of this description, a match was ratified.

The articles of agreement set forth that this should be decided by the best of six feats, each contestant being privileged to choose three, a trio of trials on each to be the maximum of attempts allowed the contestants. But this was not all! The insertion of a curious clause stipulated that either Hercules or Samson could compete against Sandow, the nomination to be left until the actual day of the match. Cute fellows, were the McCanns, there is little doubt about that. At least, on this point they were.



THE CELEBRATED EUGEN SANDOW AS HE

APPEARED WHEN AT THE ZENITH OF HIS CAREER. The match, which was held on the afternoon of December 10th, 1890, at the Royal Music Hall, Holborn, saw Hercules McCann enter the lists against Sandow, amid scenes of indescribable excitement. Again the Marquis of Queensberry and Professor Atkinson acted in the capacity of judges, being assisted in their duties by another distinguished sporting personage of that time, a Mr. Shirley B. Jevous. A mammoth audience attended, included in which was a very liberal sprinkling of some of the highest in the land.

Sandow was the first to commence operations, although his activity was not really connected with the actual contest. At the signing of the articles, doubt had been openly expressed by the McCanns as to Sandow's ability to lift 250 lbs. overhead with one hand a feat which he claimed to do nightly in his act – and the brothers had backed their opinion by wagering Sandow £100 that he would not repeat the feat, under test conditions, on the day of the match. Personal pride, added to the knowledge of his own

powers, persuaded Sandow to accept with alacrity. The most propitious moment had arrived for him to substantiate his claim, hence his anxiety to start.

The weight that Sandow proposed to lift was really a collection of weights, five in number, which he took to the shoulder with two hands. From here he experienced little difficulty in straightening his arm with them and assuming an upright position. The weights were placed on the scale and found, in all, to be 251 ½ lbs. And the judges unanimous that Sandow had made good his claim, the money of the McCanns changed hands.

Then commenced a Homeric trial of strength! McCann, who won the toss, led off with a right hand lift, using a dumb-bell weighing 170 lbs. This he took to the shoulder with one hand and, in the cleanest possible manner, jerked it overhead. Sandow followed, but failed. Again he tried, and again he failed. After a brief spell of rest, he attempted the feat once more. This time he was successful; but the judges' decision was that the point went to Hercules, because he had succeeded at the first attempt.

It is simply recording a fact to state that Sandow was more than a little surprised at the judges' decision. For successful as he ultimately had proved, he naturally counted on receiving the point awarded for such a conclusion. However, he made no protest against the ruling, but proceeded to set for Hercules a task which the latter relished so little that he refused absolutely to attempt it.

The feat selected by Sandow was the lifting of a dumbbell weighing 226 lbs. with the right hand. This weight he took to the shoulder with two hands, from whence he “bent-pressed” it overhead. Hercules protested very strongly against the use of two hands during the preliminary stage; but the judges held that the method employed was quite legitimate, consequently the protest was overruled. So to Sandow, therefore, the second point was awarded.

Hercules was now on his mettle, and for his next feat decided to call upon the left hand. Accordingly, with that hand, he took a dumbbell weighing 155 lbs. into the shoulder and endeavoured to jerk it aloft. Failure marked his first attempt, and his second also. But with the third, and last, he was successful. It was now the turn of his opponent.

Sandow took the bell in cleanly with the left hand, and “bentpressed” it to arm's length twice in succession. He then received a surprise which was so unexpected as to constitute a shock! The judges held that he was quite in order in using the method that he had employed. But McCann's style was cleaner, they said; and to him they decided the third point should go.

Eugen was disconcerted, but not discouraged! He did not pretend to understand the lines of reasoning which enabled the adjudicators to arrive at such a decision. All that he realised was the imperative necessity of equalising matters quickly. So, recognising the disinclination of Hercules to involve himself in the intricacies of the Bent Press, he took two weights, totalling 198 ¼ lbs. into the shoulder with the right hand and

steadily pushed them aloft. McCann declined to attempt the feat; therefore the judges had no alternative but to award the point to Eugen by default. So far, it would seem, the scores ran even.

McCann then tackled his famous dumb-bells lift! Grasping 120 lbs. in the right hand and 112 lbs. in the left, he pulled them into the shoulders easily enough, but failed to jerk them aloft. Once more he essayed the feat, but with no better result. Finally, he tried again. This time, up they went, much to the elation of his supporters. Sandow followed, but experienced great difficulty with this lift, failure marking all his three attempts.

The final feat was now due for decision, and its choice was Sandow's privilege. This was a "Two Hands Anyhow," in which he raised a dumb-bell of 210 lbs. with one hand, after which he endeavoured to pick up a bell weighing 50 lbs. in the other. Twice, in trying to bring in the small weight, the heavy dumb-bell crashed to the ground. Then, finally, he succeeded, amid tremendous applause. Hercules again refused to attempt an emulation.

Thus ended the meeting of Eugen Sandow and Hercules McCann, and to all present it seemed that the result was "as you were." The judges deemed otherwise, however, and named Hercules the winner, an astounding verdict which evoked a tumultuous scene, and roused feeling in the breast of he who was adjudged the loser which the passage of time has only partially softened.

IV

SANDOW had been and continued. He looked the part and filled it. The McCann brothers threatened for a few months to cast King Eugen down from his throne, but failed and disappeared into the mists from which they had emerged. Even the victory of the Hercules McCann over Sandow failed to shake the latter's supremacy, while the other strong men who secured music hall contracts, and were following Sandow's footsteps to the pay-desk, never even shook their fists at it.

There was one all-sufficing explanation for such wonderful selfrestraint on their part. They knew Sandow to be an all-round strong man, whereas they were all, more or less, specialists. One who styled himself alternately Milo and "Brinn: The Cannon-Ball King," was a weight-balancer, and perhaps the best and most convincing exponent of this style of strength demonstration that the world has ever seen. He could juggle with projectiles – big ones, at that – and would also balance cannon on his chin. Paul Conchas was another turn of this type. But neither he nor Milo were weight-lifters in the accepted sense of the word, although it is conceded, without any attempt at equivocation, that they were really very strong men.

Sandow's was always the best staged show at this time. So when such men as John Grün Marx and Vansittart came along, they could only exalt themselves on the particular virtue at which they challenged comparison; that is to say, in gripping

power. Marx, a native of Luxembourg, started out as a weight-lifter, and made his name when he lifted 300 lbs. "Two Hands Clean," a most respectable performance at that time. But the essence of his show lay in speciality feats. He used to toy absolutely with barbells and dumb-bells that no one else could lift. Not because they were so heavy so much, understand, as because their bars were so thick. For instance, Marx would challenge anyone to lift overhead his two special dumb-bells. But although many tried, no one ever succeeded in lifting them, or the £50 that Marx used to offer as a reward. Yet the dumb-bells only weighed 120 lbs. each – nothing out of the way for big men used to this kind of work – whilst Marx himself, a man of gargantuan build, weighed somewhere in the neighbourhood of 17 stone.

Now I myself have lifted a pair of dumb-bells, clean all the way, each bell weighing 95 lbs., and I scaled but 8 st. 10 lbs., stripped, at the time. Tom Pevier, the old English amateur champion, put up 234 lbs. with two dumb-bells, although Tom weighed only 12 stone in that day. No one, however, could make the ghost of a show with John Grün's dumb-bells. But then no one had hands like Marx, or – Vansittart excepted – anything like his gripping power. The bars of his bells were about 9 inches in circumference. But even at that, a man found more trouble yet. Marx wrapped lead foil, layers of it, round the bars of his dumb-bells; and lead foil slips, as one knows. But apart from his abilities in this direction, Marx was a wonderful harness-lifter, and quite a good showman as well. Not so wonderful as Sampson, of course, as you will see presently.

Marx was content to lift anything from twenty-five to thirty men at once, 6 inches clear from the floor. To do this, he would mount a platform, stand between parallel bars, and fasten harness around his shoulders and loins. This harness was attached to a cage into which a number of men would be invited to enter. The men inside, Marx would then press hard on the parallel bars, and straightening his legs and back, with a superhuman effort swing the cage clear of the floor. John Grün also tore horse-shoes apart and double packs of cards, snatched a barbell the shaft of which resembled in calibre his challenge dumb-bells, and performed other astounding feats. But as I have said, his harness feat was infantile in comparison with Sampson's.

That WAS a record – and would be one to-day, if its run had not been somewhat prematurely curtailed. Sampson lifted an elephant. To perform this feat, he mounted a platform under which stood a cage into which a big elephant was driven. Enormous chains were fastened to each corner of the cage, from whence they were taken up through holes in the upper platform, there to be attached to a yoke. Sampson climbed to the top of the platform and, crouching, placed the yoke on his shoulders. Then, pressing on the parallel bars with both hands as Marx did, he would straighten himself and stand erect, the cage with the elephant in swinging clear of the ground. This paralysing feat accomplished, Sampson would collapse, most times to be revived with brandy before he could bow his acknowledgments of the frantic plaudits. The elephant, of course, crashed down every time that Sampson collapsed. It was both a dramatic and the natural closure to the feat.

I have never been able to ascertain exactly how long this show ran. Not many days, I think, before the catastrophe occurred. Sampson had fainted as usual, been revived, and was bowing, when the spectators noticed that the elephant had not crashed as per programme, but was still swinging. Something had gone wrong with the elevating machinery – which was rather unfortunate for Sampson, as it closed his career as a showman in the strong man line of business.

To get back to the men with the grips! Marx, as I have said, was a wonder. His feats really were genuine; and if it is argued that the introduction of the lead foil wrapping imposed an unfair handicap on the ambitious seekers after £50, never lose sight of the fact that John Grün had had to overcome this himself. Nevertheless, I am inclined to believe that, remarkable though his grip was, in power it was inferior to Vansittart's.

Vansittart, an Englishman, took up physical culture more as a hobby than a business. He was fairly well endowed with this world's goods, and was never known to be short of coin. But, later, he succumbed to the lure of the footlights, and travelled the halls as “Vansart: The Man with the Iron Grip” – a label fully justified. He would hold a penny between his forefinger and thumb, then break the coin in half by pressing it against the ball of his other thumb. W.P. Caswell, the ex-lightweight amateur champion, whom Thomas Inch defeated for the world's middleweight championship, could also break a penny this way. Several other men have posed as coin-tearers and coin-breakers, but Vansart and Caswell are the only two men of whom I know who could do this.

Vansart could muscle a champagne bottle along the whole length of his arm by his uncanny control of the muscles of the limb. He also broke horse-shoes into pieces, tore tennis-balls in half, and bent and twisted wrought-iron spikes. Further, he would lay a towel across the crook of his bare arm, place a claret bottle on the towel, then smash this between his biceps and forearm. This was a very sensational feat – also an extremely dangerous one.

This man was also the greatest of all the billiard-cue lifters, a form of strength demonstration much favoured round this period. Resting the butt ends of four cues on the floor, he would nip the tips about one inch down (certainly not more) between the fingers of his out-stretched hand. The cue tips, understand, were just inserted between the fingers; not grasped in any way. Then, just turning his hand over, palm downwards, he would raise the cues from the ground until they stood out at right angles to his hand. Yes, Vansart had some strength in his fingers!

He was an odd character; a man whose greatest pleasure was to surprise people. He was a rather tall man, and although his legs were somewhat on the weedy side, his torso and arms were simply amazing. Also, he was very broad-shouldered, but would endeavour to disguise this fact by cultivating a stoop and a slouching attitude. In addition to an overcoat at least two sizes too big for him, he also wore an apologetic air and a pale complexion. The latter would certainly convey the impression that he was in a decline, rather than a man who was nightly electrifying large audiences by a display of astounding physical strength. People who met him incognito were prone to

look upon him pityingly, thinking him to be in the grip of consumption, or some other fell disease. Even on the stage his make-up could scarce disguise the pallor underneath.

Perhaps his greatest control was over his handshake. This could be limp at times; at others, well – people winced. Normally, however, it was the grip discriminating people like: firm and honest. But, oh, those fingers! He could make all the other strong men sing small once he could coax them to interlock fingers. No grip, understand! Merely the other fellow's fingers stretched out between his. It was then a case of nip for nip, and pull straight. But once any man's digits were interposed between Vansart's, there they remained until appeal was made to the mercy of the man with the grip of iron.

One thing that Vansart used to do in his show very vividly demonstrated his strength of grip, and impressed his audience accordingly. One of his assistants would lie down on a trestle-board, face uppermost, whereupon Vansart would take an ordinary 56 lbs. block weight – supplied by request by a local tradesman – turn it over, bar underneath, then make mesmeric passes with it in his hand over the man's face. Perceptible shudders ran through the audience when this feat was being performed, a fact in which Vansart seemed to delight, as he would continue to manipulate the weight over the physiognomy of the recumbent individual, until it seemed that it must slip from even his vice-like fingers. This never occurred, however, which was just as well for the fellow underneath. Strong as he was, though, Vansart did not shine as a weight-lifter, and although he has been credited with certain powers in that direction, in my opinion it would be totally incorrect to describe him as such.

The show of Morrison – “The American Hercules” – a man of colour, I never saw on the music halls, although he worked quite some time. But I once saw him give an exhibition of his powers at a coffeestall adjacent to the Camberwell Palace of Varieties, a music hall in south-east London. He was reputed to be a very strong man (concerning which I have my doubts), but was famous more for his speciality, this being coin-tearing, a display of which on this particular occasion found several sceptics the poorer by half-a-crown each after Morrison's fingers had been at work. It cannot be said, however, that, even at this branch of the business, he was either as wonderful or as resourceful as Sampson, with whom I have already dealt more than once. Hitherto, though, I have omitted to make any reference to the elephant lifter's coin-tearing capabilities, and it is only right that I should repair the injustice.

Sampson was great as a coin-tearer. Some have gone farther than that and described him as the greatest “palming” expert ever known. Perhaps he was! Anyway, I have heard it said that once in those places of public resort that close much earlier now, he asked the bystanders to test his coin-tearing powers. Any coin handed him, from five shilling pieces to sixpences, he took, tore and handed back, requesting the owners to identify their coins by the date of their minting. Some he dropped, or refused with skilful patter, confiding subsequently to my informant that he had been compelled to reject these because he had not a “readied” coin of the exact denomination and date upon him. One can only assume that he must have boasted capacious pockets, and in

them have “readied” a wide variety of coins.

That he had miles of nerve could never be disputed, and his powers of resource were of the severely practical kind. Prior to the elephant exposure, this coin-tearing feat used to wind-up his public displays. Standing in the centre of the stage, he would invite the audience to throw him silver coins, which he would catch, tear in two (or apparently do so), and toss the halves back. He was a superb showman, the feat was then new, and not infrequently the coins would come in showers. Having but one pair of hands, he could not, of course, catch them all – nor did he try! And when he considered he had missed enough, down would come the curtain, after which Sampson would sweep up a handsome addition to his salary.

And as I call upon my memory to supply material for my pen, recollections by the dozen crowd in, some with a distinctly humorous side. But before I deal with any of this nature, I have what is tantamount to a duty to perform; and that is to pay homage to Arthur Saxon, who, in his day, was truly described as “The Strongest of all Strong Men.”

V

“THE Saxons – a trio of muscular marvels – including Arthur Saxon, who claims to be the strongest man in the world, and whose astounding feats compel recognition of him as a worthy candidate for that distinction.”

(The foregoing lines are a recapitulation of how the Saxons were billed. –
THE AUTHOR.)

With the appearance of the Saxon Trio on the scene, the weightlifting side of the strong man business got down to realities; and it also rose up from them. The romance did not disappear, however; far from it! Indeed, the gate of the field of wonderment was thrown still farther open, and the horizon of possibilities commenced to widen. And if “tales of faery” were revealed as such, each and all of us was at least enabled to guess at the marvellous physical possibilities that lie within the grasp of almost every human being. We learned then, for the first time, that it was possible for any normally healthy man not only to lift but toy with weights exceeding by a considerable margin what he weighed himself. That even the lifting of elephants, and the supporting of horses and of grand pianos (as exploited by Sampson and Sandow as “stunts” of showmanship) were, with or without a meretricious enblazonment and the aid of stage mechanics, nevertheless within the range of potentiality. Within a range, that is, of which Sampson or Sandow had never advised us. And of which, if they had ever dreamed, they preferred to retain as secrets peculiar to themselves.

The Saxons, however, opened up their secrets to all the world! They lifted no elephants; tore no prepared coins; snapped no chains (half filed through or otherwise specially treated); and dispensed with the aid of unseen wires to defy, temporarily, the laws of gravitation. They professed instead to do nothing save handle and raise above

the head weights which scaled precisely all that was claimed for them – and, as it was proved on many occasions, weights which actually scaled more than they were announced to be. In this respect the Saxons were unique. And, because they were, they set a fashion that no other member of the strong man fraternity could follow without falling from high estate. So terrific, indeed, became the new standards of weightlifting set by the Saxons, that soon they ceased even to receive that type of flattery which invariably attaches to the first-class article – the flattery of the imitator. The Saxons, you see, excelled in feats which did not easily lend themselves to imitation.

They were fortunate, of course! But only fortunate in that Arno Saxon, the ex-wrestler, who conceived the idea of the troupe, had the luck to light on Oscar Hilgenfeldt and one Arthur Henning, who happened to be all that he claimed to be, viz., “The strongest man in the world.” Arthur Henning, or, to give him the name that his feats have made immortal in the weight-lifting world, Arthur Saxon, died on August 6th, 1921, of pneumonia. Most unfortunate, since he, and he alone, played the part of Atlas to the Saxon Trio, presenting strong men (and would-be strong men) the whole world over with their golden vision of the real romance of strength, in which the lifting of barbells, dumb-bells, beer-barrels and corn-sacks were only but the portals.

Arno Saxon, the creative genius of what was to prove the most formidable combination of physical strength ever seen in times on which we can place a reliable check, was himself a performer in the strong man line of business, as well as an exponent of the classic style of grappling. Nothing very wonderful, perhaps, but he had vision, a gift not usually associated with muscle when worn in bulk. And, what is more, he used this vision, which is something that redounds still further to his credit. He himself was doing fairly well, giving numerous shows per diem at a circus; but, with Sandow's salary as an example for comparison, conjectured that his talents were sadly underrated. He realised, however, that he alone could never hope to threaten Sandow's supremacy; and, therefore, no material improvement in his fortunes was likely to occur unless a miracle happened. But, as I have said before, he had vision! And, ultimately, he hit upon an idea, the putting into execution of which was destined to augment his bank-roll considerably and, incidentally, make greater weight-lifting history than had ever been made before.

In pursuance of this idea, Arno journeyed to Germany; and there, in Leipsic, where was situated one of the most famous of all the celebrated Continental weight-lifting clubs, he clinked glasses with two of its members (the aforesaid Oscar Hilgenfeldt and Arthur Hennig), and outlined his scheme to them. This was nothing more or less than a proposal that they should join forces with him, visit England, and there put on the music halls the greatest strong show that had ever been seen in that country. He dwelt on the fact that the way of the strong man in England might, to all intents and purposes, just as well pass through El Dorado, and so entrancingly did he paint the picture that long before he had finished his companions were completely convinced that up till then they had simply been wasting their time in the land of their birth. So to England they came, labelled “The Saxon Trio,” and immediately things in the strong men world began to happen.

The trio speedily secured engagements, which they signalled by issuing a challenge to Sandow, the challenge being based upon the phenomenal ability of Arthur (then but a lad of nineteen years) at the Bent Press. Arthur, at this time (1897), was lifting, in his style, 267 lbs.; and, incredible as it may seem to those not so conversant with facts as the writer, picking up a kettlebell of 119 lbs. with the other hand after he had hoisted the big bell aloft. His partners were good at their own particular feats; and, of course, all were great at the team work which so distinguished the Saxons' act. But the task of wresting the kingemperor's crown from Eugen's brow was, by unanimous consent, allocated to the redoubtable Arthur.

The Saxons opened at the Grand, Sheffield, and by every conceivable means made public an announcement to the effect that they included in their number a man who lifted nightly with one hand a weight that even Eugen Sandow would fail to raise. Naturally, this announcement focussed attention on the trio, and box-office returns at the Grand consequently swelled considerably. But although their show decidedly impressed all who saw it, the poundage of Arthur's big one hand lift was taken *cum grano salis*. Then one night, without any premature warning, Sandow turned up, disguised, and from a box conveniently situated dramatically "jumped" the usurper's stage.

Now Sandow had done this kind of thing before, as the reader will remember quite well. An astute psychologist, he realised the value of the surprise attack in any kind of warfare, and it is fairly safe to assume that he counted on things proceeding his way in consequence. He had the public with him practically to a man, a fact which could not have failed to hearten him even if he experienced any anxiety regarding the outcome of pitting his skill and strength against the claim-jumpers. But it can be taken for granted that he experienced no such feeling. Why should he? Was he not the great, the incomparable Eugen?

When Sandow tackled Arthur Saxon's barbell, however, he soon found out that he was not the only one who had realised the virtue and value of surprises! The weight of the bell alone was quite sufficient to convince him that whoever was responsible for the statement that described its poundage certainly hadn't drawn much, if at all, on his imagination. And this was not all that the conqueror of Cyclops and Sampson found out! He speedily ascertained that this bell of Arthur Saxon's simply did not want to be lifted – at least, by a stranger. It was not at all a well-behaved weight such as he was accustomed to using. When he got it to the shoulder, it rolled and tipped about in a manner alarming, in no way resembling the docile article which had gone up in Saxon's hand.

There were reasons for this, of course, which it can now do no harm to explain. Sandow, when he "bent-pressed," always tilted his bell; and the Saxons knew this – and had prepared accordingly. Inside the 3 inch diameter tubular steel bar of Arthur's big bell ran a quantity of quicksilver, which, when the bell was tilted, ran from one end to the other in just the same way as it runs in a spirit-level, rendering it absolutely uncontrollable in consequence. It made no difference to Arthur, for he always used to

lift his bell with the bar of it perfectly horizontal, the mercury thus remaining in the dead centre. But it made all the difference to Sandow, who failed, at every attempt, to elevate the ponderous weight overhead in the workmanlike way that Saxon had done, and he left the stage a much crest-fallen man. Some years after, this particular bell, by a strange coincidence, was to come into Sandow's possession; and his thoughts when he examined it at his leisure, and discovered its secret, can be left to the reader's imagination.

To get back to the occurrence and its sequel!

The Saxons, naturally, made the most of Sandow's failure, and flooded all the towns wherein they subsequently showed with posters emphasising the result. Sandow, however, did not take this reverse lying down, but took the business to law. This saw a verdict given in his favour, the judge ruling that, as he had actually handled Saxon's bell with one arm, and performed similar movements with the body while so handling it, the trio were not justified in proclaiming that Sandow had failed to lift their bell, and an injunction was granted to restrain the Saxons from repeating the proclamation. The law, it must here be said, did not display a profound knowledge of what would be held to-day to constitute the correct performance of a lift. To dismiss the matter, it can be said, however, that both parties profited by their given display of physical and mental skill to just about the extent to which they were entitled.

The following week saw the Saxons top the bill at the Parthenon, Liverpool, where they drew crowded houses, and also found an Englishman bold enough to tackle their giant barbell. This courageous personage was one George Dinnie, then our best performer at the Bent Press. But he, like others, found this implement of the Saxons present too formidable a task; and, although he made several good attempts, he ultimately had to give it best. While he was attempting to lift it, by the way, Arno substituted for the 119 lbs. kettlebell which he would also have had to pick up in the other hand to win their money, another kettle-bell weighing 180 lbs., which Arthur used to swing overhead in one movement whenever the mood was on him – a separate feat, this, of course, it must be understood. This subtle precaution proved quite unnecessary, as it happened. Still, it serves to illustrate that the mentality of the trio was such that they were always fully prepared for all contingencies.

It was during the time that the Saxons were fulfilling their engagement at this particular hall that a most humorous incident occurred, in which they were the central figures. It is generally known (among old-timers, anyway) that the trio were fond of a glass of food English beer, and one afternoon they called at an hotel in the town, kept by a well-known athlete, where they passed several hours lifting weights and drinking their favourite beverage. After they had consumed a quantity sufficient to cause the proprietor apprehension on the score of supply to his other customers, the trio thought it was about time to get along to the hall for their show; and, to finish up in style, they most emphatically wanted a cab. So a four-wheeler was placed at their disposal.

Into the cab the trio managed to squeeze themselves, Arthur and Osgard at the back,

and Arno, by far the stoutest of the three, in front. The cabby, wearing a rather worried look, whipped up his steed and set off for the hall, his fares, possessed by happy mood, singing in fairly well modulated tones, at first, their favourite German songs.

As they proceeded on their journey, however, their singing became more exuberant, until, at last, they broke out into “Deutschland über Alles” – a tune which they considered required stamping of the feet as a most necessary accompaniment. This they continued to do – needless to say, in a very energetic manner – when, all of a sudden, the bottom of the cab fell out, and there were the three Saxons in a glorious mix-up on the ground, the cab brought to a full-stop as well as their tuneful (?) melody.

Now, one would have thought that such a happening would have been sufficient to quieten even the Saxon Trio, but it did nothing of the kind. Instead, the situation realised, they broke out more vociferously than before, telling the poor old cabby, who was half-demented, to drive on, stating that they would walk inside. And walk inside the cab they did, attended by a huge crowd, in this extraordinary manner arriving at their destination, much to the amusement of Mr. Smith, the then manager of the Parthenon, who happened to be standing at the entrance.

After this gentleman had somewhat regained control of his feelings, shepherded his boisterous charges to their dressing-room, and impressed upon them the necessity of pulling themselves together as quickly as possible, he returned to the front of the hall to find that most of the huge crowd which had accompanied the cab and the trio to the doors were disappearing inside to see the show. Which caused him to experience feelings of satisfaction, this state of mind being customary to music-hall managers on occasions such as these.

The Saxons, being the star turn, were naturally late in number on the programme. But eventually their appearance was signalled, and the audience settled down to see what they expected would prove a rather unusual performance. And they were not disappointed – although it is safe to assume that what they did see before the act finished exceeded even the most prodigal of their expectations.

To the strains of inspiring music, the curtain rose, revealing three swaying figures in gladiatorial poses, the Saxon's customary and, usually, impressive opening. Arthur, with a 100 lbs. kettle-bell poised above his head, indicating an apparent intention on his part of braining Osgood, who lay almost supine on the ground, whilst Arno, in a semirestraining, semi-supplicating attitude, completed the tableau. This was held for several seconds – during which time the attitudes of the two standing poseurs underwent considerable alteration – then Arthur suddenly lowered the kettle-bell to the floor with such vigour that a cracking of the boards of the stage was distinctly audible. (What the manager said was not heard by all so plainly, but it can be taken on excellent authority that his remarks were very forcible.)

The posing concluded, Arno started out to do things. He was very good at teeth-lifting, and used to lift a man seated in a cradle arrangement by means of a “gag” attached

thereto, after which he would swing the man round and round. On this particular occasion, he apparently wished to excel himself so far as the speed of the feat was concerned, but, getting dizzy, promptly let go his hold on the gag, with the result that the unfortunate occupant of the cradle went sailing right over the heads of the orchestra into the front of the pit-stalls, Arno staggering backwards and colliding very heavily with some substantial stage scenery.

This humorous incident, which could quite easily have had serious consequences, was, however, only a prelude to what was to come.

After the tumultuous merriment of the audience had somewhat subsided, Osgard attempted a feat which, under ordinary conditions, was extremely hazardous; and which, under these, could only have one ending. This feat consisted of placing a 100 lbs. kettle-bell on his head, handle uppermost, then picking up two other kettle-bells, each also weighing 100 lbs., and lifting them overhead one in each hand. He managed to get the one on his head all right. But in stooping down to get hold of the others, over went the one he was balancing on his head into the orchestra and clean through the piano, whereupon the bandsmen scattered for dear life into the boxes on each side of the stage.

The hilarious uproar that ensued can be imagined, perhaps, but certainly not described. After a while, though, things quietened down a little, whereupon Arno was heard shouting: "Where's der pand? Ve can't berform mitout der moosic!" At which the audience went off into a fresh spasm of mirthful convulsions.

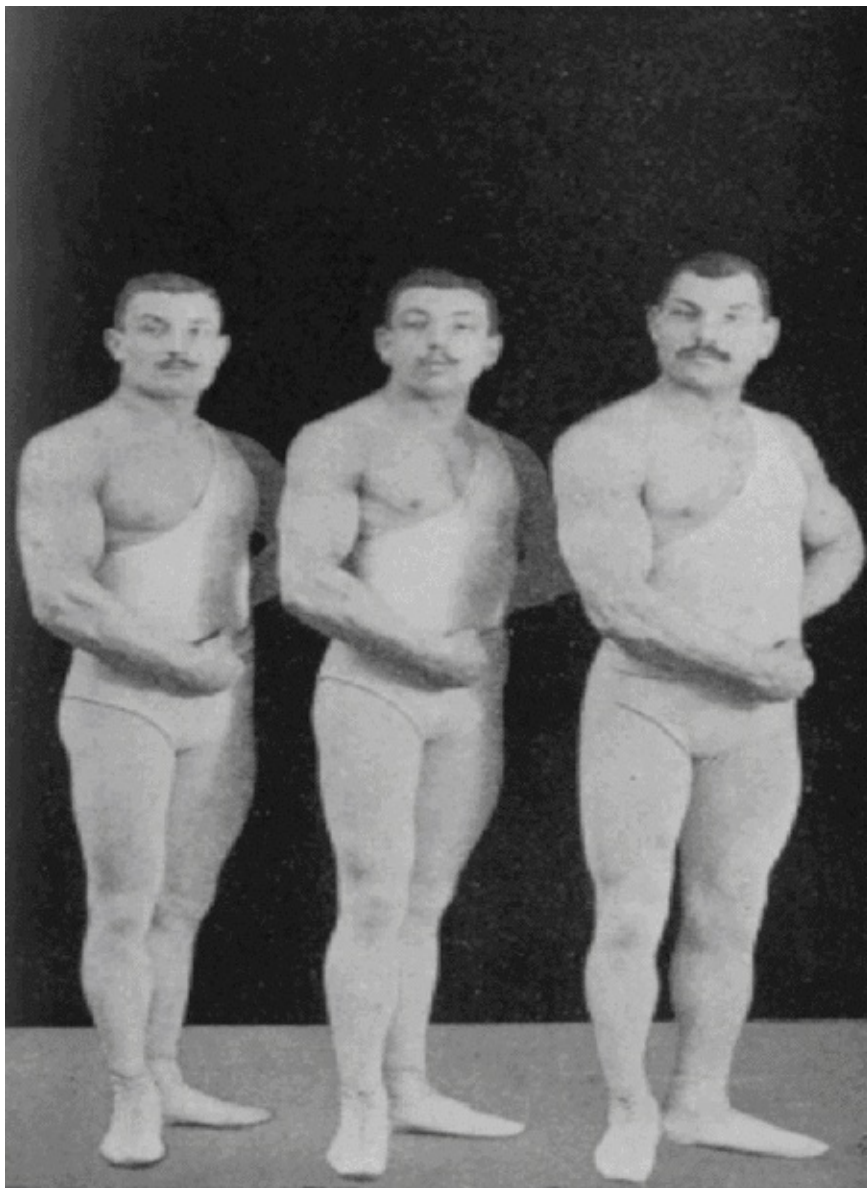
By this time, the manager had appeared on the stage, attempting to persuade the Saxons to come off, using all he knew to bring this result about. But it was no good! The trio had come on to do their performance, and do their performance they would, no matter what happened. So Arthur went on to his big one hand lift of 267 lbs., got it half-way up, when – crash! – down it came, one of the balls partially imbedding itself in the stage. At this juncture, the manager left the scene, unable any longer to look upon such happenings and remain even outwardly composed.

Then came Arthur's great supporting feat, in which he laid on his back and sustained a number of men and weights on his hands and feet. He succeeded in placing the 267 lbs. bell on his feet with a superhuman effort, after which he hooked a 100 lbs. kettle-bell on each foot. Six men were then called for and, after a deal of persuasion, secured, whereupon Arno and Osgard slapped them on to the barbell and proceeded to take their seats on another bell, which Arthur had pulled over from behind his head and pushed up to arms' length. Just as they were more or less comfortably disposing themselves, an extra lurch of the big bell proved too much for Arthur to control and over went men, weights and Saxons, all in a confused heap. Down came the curtain, and so concluded the Saxons' performance.

But what crowded houses followed! All the town and outlying districts soon heard of the Saxons' escapade, and a further week's engagement was offered them and promptly accepted, this being their third week in England.

As the Saxons travelled the country, so they ruthlessly demolished all the old standards of weight-lifting strength, setting up in their places new ones of such colossal magnitude that the men of that world marvelled. None of them have even been equalled since, let alone surpassed; and to-day it appears that we of the generation which were privileged to witness with our own eyes what these men did were indeed fortunate. For their like as weight-lifters, it seems, we shall never see again.

Myself, I owe a great debt to the Saxons, for it was from them that I received that inspiration which impelled my own steps along the path which led to a better state of health and, subsequently, the strength which has made my name so very well known to many. And ever mindful of that fact, here it devolves upon me, I consider, to chronicle a few more of their wonderful feats, if only as some small tribute to their memory.



HERMANN URT ARTHUR

THE FAMOUS ARTHUR SAXON TRIO.

Representing the greatest combination of strength that has ever been put before the public.

VI

THE Saxons' star was now in the ascendant, and there it was destined to remain. Wherever they appeared, a rousing reception was accorded them, for their feats were so obviously genuine that even the most sceptical finally had to admit that here indeed was the Simon Pure article. The winning of this recognition was not accomplished in a day, however, nor was it always secured by orthodox means. Many are the stories I could tell as I recall some of the methods employed by Arthur and his confrères to convince "doubting Thomases" of their ability to do all that they claimed – and a little more as well. Some of these I will tell in due course, as I am sure they will be read with interest.

That the Saxons remained pre-eminent may appear, to some, a rather singular fact when the history of the trio is subjected to analysis. For their personnel underwent considerable alteration between the time when they first set foot on these shores and the latter days of their career, although the fact is not generally known, even among the weight-lifting fraternity. But one unchanging figure in the combination was he who was truly named "The Iron Master." And in his retention of his position as leader lies the real reason of the Saxon Trio's supremacy as a strong show.

Oscard Hilgenfeldt was the first man to leave the trio, and upon his secession he joined forces with an Englishman who was later to prove himself one of the world's greatest masters at the Bent Press. Under the name of the Attila Brothers they toured the country, giving a show which was one of the most refined and polished of its kind. The genuineness of the claim made in respect to the Englishman's ability on the lift named was proved in rather a sensational manner when Max Unger came to London, challenging all and sundry to lift his enormous barbell with one hand. The weight of the bell was said to be 312 lbs. Whether it was or not, you will see later. Meanwhile, I will get back to the Saxons.

The passing of Oscard saw an Englishman named Somerton brought into the show, and that he was a very strong fellow may be taken for granted, otherwise the Saxons would not have had any use for him. One of Somerton's feats was a Two Dumb-bells Clean and Jerk of 103 and 105 lbs. ten times in succession. With the show he remained for some time, then he, in turn, made way for another importation from the Fatherland, a worthy rejoicing in the name of Adolf Berg. Some time after Somerton left, he challenged Inch under the pseudonym of "Loco," but although reams of paper were covered with pen tracery, the men never met, as Inch insisted on lifts at which he was specially good, Loco naturally doing the same.

Then Arno moved out, his place being filled by Herman Henning, Arthur's brother, then but a youth of seventeen years. But what a youth! Handsome features, a beautiful head of hair, a figure moulded on classic lines, he looked like a Greek god come to earth. He, like Launceston Elliott, could always have made a living in the strong man business by relying on his looks alone, but he was a true brother of Arthur, preferring to lift rather than to pose. Weighing 12 stone only, I have seen him do 297 lbs. Two

Hands Clean and Jerk, and on one occasion I saw him get Arthur's big bell of 300 lbs. to arm's length with the right hand. This, by the way, was at the old "Standard," now known as the Victoria Palace, a hall where strong shows always paid well for booking owing to its proximity to military barracks, some of the best lifters and strongest men of that day being found in the Army.

As time went on, Adolf went with it, into his shoes stepping still another brother of the leader. This was Kurt; and with his inclusion, the combination was made stronger than ever, for, before long, he proved himself every bit as good as Herman. For quite a while they continued together, these three brothers, then Herman left the fold and toured the halls in a solo act under the name of Herman Maxim, giving a wrestling show one night (he was a splendid wrestler) and a weight-lifting performance the next. During this time, the services of Adolf Berg were again requisitioned. But when Arthur decided to put on his last and greatest act, he recognised the value of Herman's company. So the prodigal returned, and Adolf finally left this muscular triumvirate to harrow a lonely furrow.

Constituted thus, the Arthur Saxon Trio – the name they went by now – toured the world, demonstrating to all and sundry their truly superhuman powers. With Wirth's Circus they toured India and South Africa – where the champion wrestlers had to strike their flag to Arthur (all the Saxons were good wrestlers, it is of interest to record), whilst America made their acquaintance through the agency of Ringling's Circus.

In his journey round this country, Arthur was continually confronted with requests to prove his extraordinary ability in one hand lifting, which he did in the following interesting way. Wherever the trio was billed to appear, the weight-lifters of that neighbourhood would be invited to bring along their own weights for him to lift with one hand – providing that they did not weigh more than 330 lbs. This, of course, presented the doubters with a difficulty which they had not foreseen, for they had no bells heavy enough to meet the champion's requirements. Nothing daunted, however, they would bring along a motley assortment of weights, which Saxon would lift for their benefit instead of the big bell which he used in his show. This settled them!

His first official record on the Bent Press in England was made on April 8th, 1903, at the South London Music Hall, the feat being accomplished at a special matinée performance, the weight of the bell lifted being exactly 314 lbs. Later, he broke this record with a lift of 335 $\frac{3}{4}$ lbs. at the same hall. This, by the way, was his greatest official performance on this lift in this country, although he came within an ace of succeeding with 353 lbs. at the National Sporting Club on January 29th, 1906. Prior to that, he had (on December 12th, 1905) lifted the enormous weight of 370 lbs. with the right hand at Stuttgart. This lift still constitutes the world's heavyweights record for a one hand lift from the shoulder overhead. And from what I know of the business, it is likely to remain the record for a long time yet.

Without wishing to introduce too many technicalities into my story, it is only fair to

Saxon to say that his failure at the N.S.C. was undoubtedly due to the fact that he was lifting with a bell to the bar of which he was unaccustomed. Otherwise, in my opinion – and I am not alone in holding that opinion – the result would have been different. The bar of the bell in question was no more than 1 inch in diameter, whereas that of the bell with which he performed most of his big lifts was no less than 3 inches in diameter. Again, the bell used by Saxon at the N.S.C. was not weighted equally at each end.

These factors contributed very largely to his failure, although he made no excuses. Six times he pressed the bell to arm's length, only to have it roll out of his fingers as he endeavoured to stand erect beneath it. The thin shaft cut deeply into his hands, and it was evident that the ordeal was a very painful one. Try as he might – and he did try, too – he could not vanquish the weight that night. And so Arthur Saxon's wonderful lift of 370 lbs. remains an official record solely on his Stuttgart achievement.

Unofficially, however, he improved even on this, several times – once notably at Apollo's School, then situated in Little Newport Street, W. Witnesses of this feat were W. Bankier (“Apollo”), Bill Klien, the well-known wrestler (now a familiar face as a masseur at “The Ring”), and Mr. John Murray (then Editor of *Health and Strength*, and of late years Editor of *Boxing*). The latter, a whole-hearted admirer of the great Arthur, will subscribe his name any time.

It happened this way! Arthur had been out all day in convivial company. Starting about 10 a.m., he toured, with several boon companions, a number of those establishments where refreshment is dispensed. At 6:30 p.m., the company dropped in at Apollo's School. And during the course of conversation, Mr. Bankier, evidently curious, and presumably uninformed, inquired whether it was really true that Arthur had ever lifted 300 lbs. with one hand.

That query was quite enough for Arthur! He proceeded to ravage the school, collected all the weights in sight, scoffed at their alleged poundages, and thereupon assembled one of the most formidable looking weights that anyone could imagine. Dumb-bells, ring-weights, all were pressed into service and affixed by cord to a barbell, which Arthur, to the spectators' undisguised dismay, announced his intention of lifting.

False centres! Well, it is safe to say that there was hardly a discoverable centre to this bar. But Arthur was not disconcerted overmuch on this point. He removed his cap and coat, and with two hands raised this extraordinary barbell to his shoulders. The three spectators shuddered! That school, understand, was on one of the upper floors; and if Arthur dropped the bell – well, how could Apollo know that the lives of the basement occupiers had been insured, not to mention those of the workers on the intervening floors?

Arthur did not drop the bell, however. He swung it round into position, and was pressing it to arm's length, when a knot loosened, and the 56 lb. dumb-bell came round and hit him in the face. Arthur lowered the weight, removed his collar and tie, re-fastened the knot, and went at the lift again. This time a kettle-weight labelled 60 lbs.

swung loose at the back end and crashed against his occiput. Arthur said a few words, lowered the conglomeration of weights once more, and removed his boots. Up again to the shoulder the bar-bell was taken, when the 60 lbs. kettle-bell came untied. This dropped off, the weight passed out of control, but the three spectators, springing forward as one man, upset Saxon on the wrestling mat and saved the flooring. Incidentally, they each collected a few bruises in the process.

Oh, I can tell you, Arthur was annoyed! This time he removed his socks, braces also, and, no belt forthcoming, proceeded to gird up his trousers with a towel. There were but vestiges of skin left between his right forefinger and thumb. But he took no notice of this; he was out to conquer that weight, or die in the attempt. Appeals were useless! Acknowledgments that all were satisfied that 300 lbs. would be but thistledown in his grip were brushed aside. That weight had positively got to go up. And at the fourth of fifth attempt (the spectators were far too nervous to keep count), Arthur's arm straightened, his body grew erect, and the colossal mass of iron had been mastered. A small weight previously attached had fallen off – not the 60 lbs. kettle-bell, which had been re-affixed – but on that score Arthur did not worry. All that remained was scaled, the grand total registering exactly 386 lbs. The authenticity of this performance rests solely on the testimony of Messrs. Bankier, Klien and Murray, any of whom would take great pleasure, no doubt, in denying that they were present, if only able to reconcile the statement with their consciences.

Now, although myself a member of a fraternity notoriously sceptical so far as the feats of some others are concerned, I personally would be the last to doubt any feat with which Arthur Saxon was credited. For, with my own eyes, I have seen him perform many feats equally as remarkable. In his act, he used to support anything from twelve to eighteen men on his feet, seated on a long, stout ash plank; and the heavier the men were, the better he seemed to like it. As if this were not enough, he would then bring from behind his head a barbell weighing 232 lbs., on which his two brothers would seat themselves, usually accompanied by the heaviest stage-attendant they could find. The total poundage of this feat used to run into figures well over a ton – and he did it many hundreds of times.

In the manner in which he displayed his superhuman strength, the redoubtable Arthur was extremely versatile; juggling, balancing, supporting, as well as actual lifting feats, at each and all of these he shone. As an example of the former, it may be mentioned that the Saxon Trio opened their act by spinning and twirling kettle-bells in a very spectacular way. The weight of the kettle-bell used by Arthur was 119 lbs., and in the tabulation of the various weights used in one of Arthur's supporting feats, this particular bell and its companion used to be described by one of the brothers as “little, light juggling weights.” This, of course, was a slight touch of that ironical humour for which the Saxons were noted. They were great “leg-pullers,” as will be seen by the following:

The Saxons were appearing at a hall situated not far from where I live, when the wire went round that Arthur Saxon's big bell was on display outside the front of the hall,

accompanied by a notice to the effect that whoever succeeded in lifting it overhead with two hands, after Arthur Saxon had, that night, done so with one, would be presented with the sum of £100. This brought along all the then strong men of the neighbourhood; and eventually, stimulated to action by the promptings of his admirers, one, a little more venturesome than the rest, succeeded, after a bit of a struggle, in putting the bell up. The example spreading, several others then had a shot, and two more were successful. In view of this, it certainly seemed that the Saxon Trio would not have a lot of money to draw that week, after the claims of these three gentlemen, and possibly others, had been met.

News of the success that had attended the unofficial attempts of the three ambitious seekers after the Saxon Trio's £100 soon spread, and when night time came, the hall was literally packed. The Saxons, apparently blissfully unconscious of the state of penury to which very shortly they would be reduced, went through their act without a hitch, and then the announcement was made from the stage that the competition would take place. The suspicion of a smile seemed to lurk round Arthur's mouth as Adolf made his speech, and there certainly was a twinkle in his eye. Meanwhile, competitors were making their way towards the stage, encouraging cries greeting them from all parts of the house.

Arthur's giant barbell was placed in the centre of the stage. Upending it, the champion grasped it firmly in the middle and, taking it easily to the shoulder, pressed it steadily aloft to arm's length overhead. He then transferred it into the grasp of both hands and replaced it gently on the ground.

The competitors, now minus coats and waistcoats, and with sleeves rolled up to the fullest extent, then came forward. But, strange to say, not one of them succeeded in lifting the bell as much as half an inch from the ground. You see, the bell was now loaded, weighing at least 300 lbs. – and possibly a good deal more. When it reposed outside the hall in the morning, it was empty, its weight being slightly less than half those figures. Yes, the Saxons knew how to advertise!

I have previously spoken of Arthur Saxon's versatility! Many believe, I know, that he was a one hand lifter pure and simple, but such is not the case. So far as his ability in lifting a bar-bell with two hands is concerned, I would not commit myself definitely, but I can truthfully say that I have seen him take two square half-cwts. in each hand, raise them from outside his feet to the shoulders, then steadily press them aloft six times in succession without the slightest bend in the body. Again, I have seen him put a sack of flour overhead with two hands, a story which I will tell later.

So far as carrying was concerned, Arthur had little to fear by a comparison between himself and Milo of Croton. I have seen him place a 232 lbs. bar-bell across his shoulders, on which Herman was seated by Kurt. Eight men were then invited to hang on to the bar-bell (four each side), which they did, to be carried from one end of the stage to the other and back again with no sign of really strenuous effort. Occasionally, he would vary this procedure by swinging the men round and round, much to their

ultimate discomfiture. For upon slowing-up, the men were dizzy; and their efforts to walk straight from off the stage after having been replaced on terra firma never failed to provide a fund of merriment for the audience.

One of the things which helped to make the Saxon Trio's show a very positive draw was their sack of flour competition. This sack weighed 280 lbs., and the terms of the competition were that the sack should be lifted from the floor on to the shoulders, then carried off the stage, body erect. Throughout their long sojourn in this country, no one ever succeeded in accomplishing this feat. Herman, then quite a youth, used to demonstrate how easy the feat was (when you could do it) regularly every Friday night, this being the time of the competition final.

Impossible of achievement as the lifting of this particular sack proved, it was, nevertheless, but one of their court cards. The ace they kept up their sleeve in view of possible eventualities. Extremely careful men were the Saxons when it came to the phrasing of competition conditions, very little being left to chance. Their posters dealing with the sack of flour competition said: "£10 will be given to any man who can lift THE SAME SACK in THE SAME MANNER as ONE OF THE SAXONS CAN DO IT." The capitals, it should be pointed out, are my own. Their significance will be seen shortly.

The Saxon Trio, billed to appear at the Camberwell Palace of Varieties (it was their second visit to this hall), were getting their weighty "props" in on the Sunday morning preceding the Monday opening of their show, when their baggage man, one William Slade, himself a very strong man for his weight, proceeded to give Arthur some well-intentional advice concerning the advisability – or, rather non-advisability – of displaying the sack competition poster in this particular neighbourhood.

Slade was a native of Camberwell, and had good reason to know the capabilities of some of the strong men resident there – of which, at this time, there were quite a number. He knew of a man, he said, working at the local flour factory, who, it was reputed, could carry a sack of flour under each arm and one on his back at the same time. He also knew that this man had signified his intention of entering as a competitor. And so positive was Slade that this prodigy was not overrated, that he advised Arthur to have the competition bills blotted out.

Arthur smiled. "I don't think he will take our money, Slade," he said. "Read the bill again. It says nothing about lifting the sack on to the shoulders, nor does it say the sack to be lifted is the one that Herman uses. We, too, have heard of this man; and if he can lift the sack we shall have in readiness to-morrow as I, not Herman, lift it, then all I can say is that he is wasting his time working at a flour factory. Bring our emergency sack, Herman!" And in was trundled what Arthur very aptly termed the "emergency" sack.

This was quite an innocent looking affair, at first glance, but it was full of surprises to those in the know. Neither round, nor oblong, nor square, but a cross between all three, it presented no taking-hold surface. And, on top of that, it was very slippery, having

been liberally treated with French chalk. As if this were not enough to make it almost impossible to lift, it had a 56 lbs. weight concealed therein, placed one side to disturb the balance. "There's the sack, Slade," said Arthur, "see what you can do with it." Slade obeyed. He could do nothing.

Arthur then removed his coat. Straddling the sack, he bent down and placed his arms around it, interlacing his fingers. (What hands he had, by the way: simply prodigious.) Then, lifting sheer, he raised the sack from the floor on to his knees. A heave, and it was resting on his chest, from whence he "jumped" it until it laid lengthwise, with his hands beneath it, at the shoulders. One supreme effort, and it was – half pushed, half jerked – at arm's length overhead. We stood spellbound. Accustomed to expect almost anything from this son of Anak, this was nevertheless something approximating the final syllable. "Think your man will do that, Slade?" said Arthur. Eventually Slade found his tongue. "Not in a thousand years," he replied. "Well," said Arthur, "he will have to do it during the week if he wants that £10." The weight of the sack, it transpired later, was a little over 3 cwt.

Monday night came, and with it a host of competitors, among them the giant whose reputation had preceded him. Undoubtedly an extremely powerful man, he nevertheless failed to raise the ordinary sack as high as his knees, so, therefore, was spared the shock which he would have received had he been introduced to the emergency sack. The competition, as a matter of fact, was won by Slade himself, who had a unique method of dealing with this particular problem, as I will now proceed to describe.

Slade would seat himself on the stage with the sack between his legs, pull it over on to his chest and push it up therefrom until it rested on his knees, which he would draw up after pulling the sack over. Then, retaining its balance with one hand, he would use the other to assist himself to rise, after which he would clasp it with both arms and "jump" it up on to his chest. Many others, after watching Slade perform, endeavoured to employ this method, but when the sack came over, more often than not it completely flattened them out. Their efforts to free themselves used to amuse the spectators immensely. Luckily, however, the Saxons were always on hand to help; otherwise, the hospitals and undertakers might have had some additional work found for them.

Another competition run by the Saxons which attracted large numbers of entrants, and incidentally provided lots of fun, was that of lifting a barrel of beer. Or, at least, that is what it was alleged to be. The barrel had to be lifted from the floor to the shoulders, then to arms' length overhead, the prize offered being a barrel of beer and a box of 100 3d. cigars.

Arthur used to demonstrate how really easy it was to lift the barrel, which weighed 220 lbs., by swinging it from between his legs to arms' length overhead in practically one continuous movement, holding it by the chimes alone. No one ever succeeded in lifting this barrel higher than the shoulder, although many expressed themselves confident of drinking what it was supposed to contain. I think, however, that they

would have had to travel some considerable distance to approach the Saxons even in this respect. For, as has already been hinted, the Saxons were no Pussyfoots.

They were recklessly brave men, the Saxon Trio! One of their feats, staged for the first time at Hengler's Circus – on the site of which the Palladium Music Hall now stands – may, by some, be remembered. They had an immense wooden bridge constructed, which ran across the circus from one entrance to the other, weighing, it was ascertained, just over 2 tons. Underneath the middle of the bridge were placed two cushioned rests.

Whilst reclining on their backs, the Saxons would bring their legs up at right angles to their bodies, and placing their feet beneath the centre of the structure, lift it clear of its supports by straightening their legs. At a given signal from Herman, a motor-car, in which were seated nine wrestlers, including Ivan Padoubny, the gigantic Russian (this feat was performed at the time when all the world's best wrestlers had come over to compete in London for the championship and diamond belt), would then be driven in from the street up the incline of the bridge until it reached the middle, where it would stop over the Saxons. Arthur and Kurt would sustain the combined weight of the car, men and bridge for about six seconds at this point. The car would then pursue its journey over the bridge, down the decline, out into the street on the other side of the circus, after which the Saxons bent their legs, allowing the bridge to crash down on its supports. It was both a colossal and terrifying feat, and had to be seen to be believed.

Performing this feat at Brussels, with twelve men piled on to the motor, the car swerved and left the channelled bridge, which collapsed sideways, and the pillars went to hospital. The total weight supported by Arthur and Kurt on this occasion was just over 6,600 lbs. Everyone thought they were killed, but although pretty badly mangled, they escaped with their lives. Kurt was pinned by an iron bolt through the leg to one of the timbers, and Arthur had several bones broken. This mishap, however, failed to quench Arthur's indomitable spirit; and when he eventually recovered, he decided to repeat the feat, although to do so it was necessary to press Herman into service. Kurt had no further use for what used to be very appropriately described as "Brooklands on Four Legs."

And now Arthur Saxon has left that stage where all of us are merely players, leaving behind him, though, a reputation which lives on. Acclaimed the strongest man in the world of that day, his many astounding feats left no other option but to accredit him indeed the most worthy of all claimants for that proud distinction. *Sic transit.*

VII

ARTHUR SAXON, of course, put most of the other strong men and great weight-lifters out of court. His feats were so remarkable that the others who sought public fame had to fall back on showmanship rather than on records to establish renown of any kind. They were strong men, undoubtedly: men who would have made their mark at any ordinary time. But whilst Arthur Saxon was in the field they had, perforce, to refrain

from inviting comparison. Some of them did not pose specially as weight-lifters, although it is fairly safe to presume that they had developed their physical powers and muscularity by such means. And little doubt exists but that, despite the handicap of Saxon's presence, they could have won fairly enduring fame at the sport, if the public had been educated in those days to the institution of proportionate comparisons.

Oscard and Albert Attila, better known as the Attila Brothers, were notable examples. Oscard, who, it will be remembered, was associated with the formation of the first Saxon Trio, was a wonderfully strong man at double-handed lifting, and on this he used to specialise. But Albert's speciality was the Bent Press. In this style he used to lift a most formidable looking bar-bell weighing about 220 lbs., the globes of which were generously studded with iron spikes. Together, they used to give a very polished and spectacular show, and the competitions which they held wherever they went were eagerly anticipated by certain individuals, who regarded this feature of the strong shows of that day as heaven-sent opportunities for adding to their income. More will be said about the Attila Brothers later. Meanwhile, I pass on to William Bankier, conjointly known as "Apollo: The Ideal Athlete" and "The Scottish Hercules."

Apollo broke new ground altogether. He had, and possibly still has, one grievance with fate. Though comparatively a small man physically, he repeatedly challenged the great Eugen Sandow to a test of strength, this to be decided by weight-lifting pure and simple, or by any other tests to be agreed between them. Sandow, however, did not accept Apollo's *defi*, and the challenger's supporters did not hesitate to make capital out of Sandow's shyness. But if he failed in his one great ambition – which was to prove that "Bonnie Scotland" could breed equally as strong men as any hailing from foreign shores – William Bankier did, at least, succeed in making many acquainted with new and possible applications of strength.

Apollo, who possessed a superb development, gave a show which the public liked. Opening, he posed after classical statuary, then went on to display the strength which his development indicated. One or two feats with billiard cues usually formed the lead up to the more imposing stuff, among which was a one hand lift overhead of a man clad in a suit of armour, after which Apollo used to jump clean over the back of a chair, holding in each hand a 56 lbs. weight. This feat always got a good round of applause.

The Scotsman then used to place himself beneath a large platform, which he supported across his knees and shoulders, his head appearing through a specially cut opening, his arms and legs forming the four pillars of support. Upon this platform, by the united efforts of some seven or eight men, a grand piano would be placed, after which the men would mount the platform, and with one taking his seats at the instrument, a novel concert party would be held for a brief period. It was a very spectacular feat.

His show used to conclude with a sack of flour competition, as for several years did that of the Saxon Trio. Apollo's competition, however, was run on different lines, for whilst the famous brothers stipulated that their sack should be lifted and carried off the

stage “body erect,” the men who made a bid for Apollo's prize money were compelled to lie face down on the stage, pull the sack over on to their back, then rise and carry it off. So far as I am aware, one man only ever succeeded in doing this properly, the name of this performer being Edward Aston, due for some comment later.

When Apollo went to India, however, it was quite a different matter. The mysteries of leverage and strength application ceased to be mysteries in the Orient several generations ago, and I have heard it said that when Apollo invited Hindoo and Mussulman strong men to cope with the feat, he found far more successful competitors than he had encountered in this country. His “sack-catching” feat, though, went down extremely well. This was really a great performance. The sack would be dropped on him from a height, and Apollo would catch it, without being crushed by the falling weight. It was a novel and daring innovation.

He also staged another feat which was very spectacular. This brought in a motor-car. Lying on the ground, Apollo would endure the passage of a motor-car, loaded with men, across his neck. There was no trick about this feat, which admits of simple explanation. He resisted the passing weight by the concentrated flexion of his neck muscles, there being very little doubt that he picked up quite a few wrinkles in this connection from his association with the Japanese jiu-jitsu wrestlers, who used to make quite a feature of their strength of neck as a prelude to the serious business of their show. Apollo, some may remember, at one time managed Yukio Tani. This clever Japanese exponent used to allow six men to bear down with all their might on a stout bamboo pole placed across his throat whilst he laid on his back on the ground. After sustaining this pressure for an appreciable length of time, Tani would adroitly free himself by a turn of the neck and a somersault.

The herculean business, it seemed, had been exploited pretty thoroughly. But a new man was to make his appearance (he had already appeared, in fact) and take the potentialities of the strong man's stock-in-trade into the realms of fantasy. This was Bert Wickham, a man of many parts – also a man of many sweaters.

Wickham had one forerunner, a painfully thin-limbed Austrian, who passed by the name of Herr Georg Lettl, a man who prattled of his electric energy and who professed to be, more or less, supernaturally gifted. Anyway, for a start, he stopped motor-cars in transit – on the stage. Yes, he actually did this. But these, I have always understood, were exceptionally light in the rear, thus enabling him to lift them clear of the ground, so that, when the engines were thrown into gear, the back wheels failed to grip the floor. This manoeuvre, of course, was not perceptible to the audience.

Lettl, who made a feature of displaying a pair of arms almost void of muscular development, informed the world that he did it all by sheer mental power. In the end he disappeared, without any public exposure. But not before he had collected considerable largesse as a reward for his ingenuity; and presumably indulged in many full-sized laughs at the expense of the great British public. Still, the Austrian had shown the way to Wickham, and that king of showmen stepped right into it.

One has to hand it to Wickham! No man in this line of business ever secured so much free publicity, and no single one ever made such prolific and profitable use thereof. He appeared initially somewhere in Wales, I believe, but it was at Hengler's Circus that Londoners first saw his show. He claimed to be able to pull up motor-cars in full career, and in his act, apparently, he did. Cross-examined in his dressing-room one night on this feat, out of the interlocution grew an episode fantastic in the extreme.

No single event in the whole history of strong man showmanship was ever so brilliantly stage-managed, so highly coloured for the Press, or so artistically developed. Three or four "experts" had accompanied Bert down Regent Street as far as Piccadilly Circus. Here the group halted, still discussing his more or less miraculous powers. "But can you really pull up a car?" "Can you really pit your strength successfully against that of a full power motor-engine?" Wickham was asked. And like lightning came the answer.

Wickham glanced quickly around, then dashed from off the pavement at a taxi flashing by, grabbed the bar supporting the number plate and pulled the vehicle to a standstill within a few yards. His case was proved! All the evening papers, and not a few of the more sober morning dailies, had columns about it. The provincial papers, less careful of the probabilities, told their staggered readers that Bert Wickham had pulled up an L.C.C. tram-car in the Brixton Road. They did not trouble about accuracy of detail.

Nor did it matter, for Bert Wickman was made. Mattressed in his many sweaters, he toured the country at no small profit to himself. At this time, wrestling was beginning to be the big noise, so Bert "travelled" several wrestlers. The star of his troupe he would volunteer to match, for good money deposited, against the best that could be found. And as he was usually wise enough, or lucky enough, to pick good men, he would generally manage to stimulate sufficient interest to fill up half an evening's entertainment.

Then the great man himself would come on the scene, with motor-car complete. He always "travelled" his own, by the way, and was invariably able to fix up with a local chauffeur who would listen to reason. Incidentally, he would tear packs of cards and break horseshoes, the latter of which could only have fitted elephants – monstrous things, which would be brought up to him amid protests from the spectators. Next would come his challenge at great length to any man in the world for the best of eleven, thirteen, fifteen, or even seventeen events – swimming, which would have entailed the removal of the seven or eight sweaters that he used to wear, carefully eliminated. Then, finally, Bert's colossal feat of holding back two motor-cars.

Chained between the two, Bert – or any M.C. that he might have vicariously engaged – would explain what he was going to do, and dilate on the superhuman strength required. Then the motor-engines would be started, the spectators would be able (thanks to a ray of limelight) to observe that Bert's features were horribly contorted owing to the terrific strain, and the miracle would be manifest. Bert would strain, and continue to strain; whereupon the cars, despite the protest of their engines, would

slowly roll back to him.

A great feat! A feat which transcended even the elephant lifting of the mighty Sampson, until one unhappy night at a Lancashire music hall, when something went wrong with the works, the how and why of the going wrong now being due for description.

It was a hired chauffeur who played this scurvy trick upon him; played it, too, almost at the start of a circuit engagement of which he had angled long and most assiduously. Bert had, as usual, looped around himself the chains from each of his two motor-cars, when the wicked local man, instead of reversing (the secret of this feat), jammed his gear lever into one of the forward speeds and went off the stage, right through the scenery into the wall of the theatre itself, trailing poor Bert himself and his own old "bus" behind. This was, of course, Wickham's finish.

But before concluding with Wickham there are one or two other things to tell. It is not right to dispose of Bert so summarily, for he was more than an episode. He was the exaggeration of an epoch. Why, obsessed strength worshippers would swarm to railway stations to see him pull back trains in motion.

This feat, which never failed to command profound respect, took the form of a farewell "stunt." Wickham, who rarely missed any opportunity of displaying his manifold gifts in company, would usually be seen off at the local railway-station by a small host of admirers. And with these he would chat until his train commenced to move out. Then, leaping forward, he would grasp the handle of a carriage door and, after conspicuously putting out all his power in one mighty pull, swing it open and depart, waving adieux, leaving the gaping spectators with the firm conviction that he had actually arrested the speed of a locomotive. Sounds a bit farfetched, writing now, I am prepared to admit. Nevertheless, it is perfectly true.

A feat just about as genuine was the one in which the horseshoe figured. On arriving in any town where he was due to appear, Bert would visit the leading blacksmith and order a special horseshoe to be made. This done, he would then invite the smith to advertise that this would be offered as a test of his (Wickham's) powers, pointing out that the exhibition of the shoe outside the smithy or the hall would prove an excellent free advertisement for the firm. The special shoe, it was customary to state, would come up for judgment on the Friday or Saturday night, whichever happened to be reckoned the best show night of the week. And, upon inspection of the shoe when it was made, Wickman would approve so highly of it that he would order a duplicate to be made at once. An extension of the advertisement, he was always careful to point out.

Along would come the eventful night, and with it the special horseshoe. This Bert would wrestle with unavailingly, finally to throw it down in disgust, where-upon it would bounce or skate off the stage into the wings. Immediately after, it would be returned to him from the side. But Bert would infer that he had had enough; really, it had proved more adamant than even he had expected. Ultimately, however, he would

be prevailed upon to try again. Amid a silence that could be felt, he would make one last, supreme effort; and, wonder of wonders, the recalcitrant shoe would be rent in twain. But as the shoe was never broken until it had first paid a visit to the wings, unkind critics strove here to find a logical explanation of Bert's prodigality in ordering always a pair of shoes instead of one only.

The locomotive farewell "stunt," however, prompted one of the best music-hall burlesques ever staged. This was given by a little man styling himself Wert Bikkam (rumour said that, at one time, he had been Bert's manager), who waddled on to the stage swathed in more wrappings than an Egyptian mummy. After travestyng many of Wickham's feats, a huge commissionaire would rush on and protest about something; whereupon Bikkam would clutch this giant and fling him back into the wings – from whence he would immediately return, to swing backwards and forwards across the stage, manifestly suspended by a wire. The travesty would close with the snorting, puffing entrance of a "property" locomotive, which would be grasped and swung in circles round his head by the strong man parodist. So although for some time now Bert had gone, by satire his memory was still kept verdant.

A showman of equal genius to Wickham, but of entirely different genie – a real strong man, and a clever weight-lifter to boot – was Monte Saldo, whose stage showmanship was best displayed, perhaps, in a turn which he presented with the assistance of his brother Frank, entitled "The Sculptor's Dream," certainly one of the most artistic and impressive of any ever given.

The curtain rose disclosing a sculptor's studio, with the sculptor at work on a reproduction of a well-known classical statue. This figure was Monte himself, painted and garbed in an excellent imitation of marble, and behind him was a mirror, in which the statue could be seen reproduced. After working a while, the sculptor wearied, and concealing his masterpiece behind curtains, stretched himself at length upon a couch, soon to be ostensibly asleep.

The curtains thereupon parted on their own account, revealing the statue in another classical pose, again reflected in the mirror. Then once more they closed, only to re-open and repeat their re-opening to the revelation of ever fresh poses and reflections, until finally the statue and mirror reflection confronted each other in a famous wrestler's attitude. A pause, and then the mirror fell crashing as the "reflection" – brother Frank, to be more explicit – leapt out to grapple with Monte, and execute on the stage a variety of wrestling postures.

This unique opening was followed by a series of equally novel strengthen feats in which both iron and human weights figured, closed by Monte pressing Frank aloft with one hand, and a twirl round of the supported performer. This twirl, by the way, was very smartly done. As Frank leant back to be supported on Monte's palm, the lifter would interpose a revolving disc on which his brother's back rested. Thus, when Frank had been pressed aloft, it enabled Monte to spin him.

At this juncture, the sculptor would commence to stir, whereupon both statue and

“reflection” would leap back and, resuming their original poses, thus satisfy the now awakened chiseller of marble that all which had transpired was actually nothing but a dream.

Monte Saldo was one of the very few men who have enhanced a reputation made on the stage as a strong man by feats performed away from its atmosphere of glamour and make-believe. The first man in the world to “swing” over his own bodyweight with one hand, and one of the most successful trainers of strong men ever known, of Monte you will here more anon.

VIII

MORE or less contemporary with the personalities I have recently mentioned passed a quartette of strong shows which call for at least a brief review. First, that of Ben Hur, who (in private life, Dick Solomon) fell back on the panoplied trappings of Ancient Rome to provide an impressive stage setting. A fairly hefty chap, his principal feat was to carry a sack of sand weighing 330 lbs. off the stage in the same way as did Apollo. His best overhead lift, though, was a 90 lbs. dumb-bell in each hand. Amateurs half the size of this performer can do this to-day.

The Atlas and Vulcana troupe put on an excellent show, but where the poundage of their weights was concerned, they travelled a long distance from fact. Charming ladies used to perform a few light exercises with a pair of “112 lbs.” ring-weights, finishing by holding them out at right angles to the body, while the male members of the troupe used to juggle with them in such a disdainful manner as would have made Paul Cinquevalli hide his head in shame. They enjoyed a very successful run for some years, though, until, one week, they visited Camberwell – at which place they underwent a rather humiliating experience, and learned an obviously-much-needed lesson.

Bertisch was another strong man whose conscience never kept him awake at night. One of his great feats was to toss “336 lbs.” overhead with one hand as easily as a bull would a matador's cloak. He kept on doing this until Edward Aston went on the stage one night, and did it even easier than Bertisch – also, more times. Take 200 lbs. away from the figures claimed, and the reader will have a pretty good line to what the bell actually weighed.

Then there was Lionel Strongfort, who put on one of the best shows ever seen in London. A wonderful showman, and a most imposing figure of a man, he drew big houses until little Albert Attila “jumped” his stage one night, and – by lifting his biggest show bell with one hand – came away richer by £25, after having dealt Strongfort's lifting reputation in this country a blow from which it never recovered. An interesting happening, this, you would no doubt like to hear the full story.

**STRONGFORT, CHAMPION ATHLETE OF THE WORLD, IN SENSATIONAL
FEATS OF STRENGTH**

CHALLENGE TO THE WORLD

£25 will be given to anyone who can accomplish Strongfort's feat of lifting with one hand overhead a dumb-bell weighing 312 lbs., The World's Record.

Such were the startling headlines that appeared on the posters outside the London Pavilion, Piccadilly Circus, W., some years ago. Lionel Strongfort – previously known as Max Unger – was challenging the world at one hand lifting, apparently quite regardless of the dire consequences to himself that such a daring challenge would bring in its train.

That Strongfort did not know what would most certainly happen as a result of this challenge cannot be said, as Thomas Inch had previously warned him that both Arthur Saxon and Albert Attila would make short work of his bar-bell – it was not a dumb-bell at all, by the way – if ever they came on to the stage. Strongfort, however, saw fit to disregard the warning, asserting that Albert Attila was not heavy enough to lift the weight; and, as Arthur Saxon was known to be in Manchester, it was not likely that there was anything to be feared in that direction. And, cheerful optimist that he was, he carried on.

Half way through the week, Attila, who had been acquainted of the challenge, showed up in company with a friend; and, having comfortably ensconced themselves in seats quite close to the stage, waited for Strongfort's turn to come on. Ultimately, his number appeared, and the first act of the drama was staged.

Strongfort, first of all, gave quite a good exhibition of muscular posing, following this with a number of interesting feats of strength, after which came the challenge directed to any man in the world to lift his ponderous looking bar-bell, this being rolled slowly forward to the centre of the stage. The bar-bell, it was said, weighed 312 lbs., and to any man who could lift it overhead with one hand the sum of £25 would be given.

The challenge delivered, up on to the stage stepped Attila, curious to see what the weight of this bell really was. For that it really weighed 312 lbs. he did not believe. He knew, as well as anyone else, that the only man capable of lifting such a weight overhead with one hand was the redoubtable Arthur Saxon. His own capabilities ranged somewhere in the neighbourhood of 240 lbs. – really wonderful lifting when it is remembered that he never scaled more than 10 st. 7 lbs. More wonderful still perhaps when it is known that, despite his Teutonic appellation, he was an Englishman.

Upon testing the weight, Atilla found that it was vary far from being as heavy as had been stated. To use his own words: “It might have weighed an ounce or so over 190 lbs., but not a fraction more.” Rather surprised, he turned to Strongfort and said: “Surely you are not offering £25 to any man who can lift this?” To which question Strongfort replied: “Yes, we give £25 to anybody.” Upon hearing this, Atilla stated that he would accept the challenge there and then, and lift the bar-bell, whereupon Strongfort responded, apparently quite unperturbed, “All right. Do it!”

Attilla wasted no time in standing the bell on end, and, determined to take no chances, asked Strongfort whether he wanted it lifted to the shoulder with one hand or with two? "Two," was the answer, and hardly was the word out of his mouth before Attilla had turned the bell over, from which position he pressed it quickly overhead to extended arm. Aloft he held it for a few moments, then lowered and replaced it on the stage.

Turning to see what Strongfort had to say, Attilla found himself quite alone on the stage, Strongfort and his manager having disappeared. And there he stood, the recipient of stentorian cheering, waiting for that £25 which did not seem over-anxious to turn up. In the wings, the stage manager could be seen frantically beckoning him to come off. But Attilla was not having any. He was an old stageperformer himself, and he knew the game. So, as he would not leave the stage, the massive tableau curtains were dropped. Attilla. However, expecting this ruse, jumped in front of them, people in the house meanwhile yelling to him to stop where he was until he got the money – something which he fully intended to do.

The band played, the tabs went up again, and on came the next turn. Still Attilla refused to budge. The audience, now worked up to a pitch of frenzy, hooted this turn off, stridently calling all the time for Attilla to be paid the money which he had so fairly and so easily won. At last, the acting manager of the hall came forward and requested silence. When this had been ultimately secured, he handed Attilla twenty sovereigns and a five pound note, for which Attilla thanked him, also the spectators for their support, after which, without any more ado, he quietly left the building.

So finished Lionel Strongfort's attempt to issue challenges in what was at that time practically the centre of the weight-lifting world with a bar-bell not up to a weight to warrant such a sweeping *defi*. Now for the sequel!

The next morning, Attilla was in the sanctum of the Editor of the *Sporting Life*, giving that worthy details of the affair, when who should come hastening up the stairs but Tom Inch, with the news that he had Arthur Saxon downstairs, straight from Manchester; further, that they were going to accept Strongfort's challenge that very evening. When Inch was informed that the £25 had already been collected, he immediately called to Arthur Saxon to come upstairs. Up came the Saxon Trio's leader, as bidden, practically to explode when the information was passed on to him.

Checkmated as was Strongfort by Attilla, he could, in my opinion, yet consider himself a lucky man, for it was only the fact that Saxon came a day too late that prevented a juggling exhibition being given with what he was pleased to describe as a challenge bar-bell. Quite recently, I may add, Strongfort has stated that the explanation of Attilla's success was that the bar-bell had been tampered with that very day, without his knowledge, by the man who lifted it. But all the facts that I have in my possession go to prove that this explanation is as chimerical as it is belated.

IX

But although, as I have shown, there had been numerous strong shows, genuine and otherwise, in the long years that followed the McCann Sandow match, there had been no weight-lifting contests save that for the Cadbury Cup (won by Maspoli, the great French lifter), and two or three championship competitions promoted and organised by the Amateur Gymnastic Association. These were, however, strictly amateur events. Weight-lifting lacked a press; and as a natural consequence, was generally supposed to lack a public as well.

That this supposition was erroneous was demonstrated when Thomas Inch, of Scarborough, who had made a study of weight-lifting, came out into the open at the end of 1906 and challenged for the world's middle-weight weight-lifting championship. This looked to be a very bold bid, since at the time it was generally believed that weightlifting was a sport which the Continental athletes had made their very own, and consequently it would be as idle for Britishers to dispute their preeminence as it would be for Continentals to challenge English and Australian supremacy at cricket. Again, Inch was more or less an unknown quantity. An authority on matters physical, maybe! But could he lift? That remained to be seen.

The challenge remained unanswered for several months. No Englishman seemed likely to accept. House, the middleweight amateur champion, apparently was not inclined to relinquish his amateur status; Pevier and Elliott, amateurs also, could not do the weight. And it appeared that on the Continent the challenge had not been noted. Then, just as it seemed that nothing would materialise from Inch's *defi*, two acceptors turned up, strange to say, practically simultaneously. Maurice Deriaz, the Swiss middleweight lifter (equally famous as a wrestler and artists' model), came over, only to be informed that he was too late, as W.P. Caswell (winner of the last lightweight amateur weight-lifting championship) had mustered up sufficient courage to accept Inch's challenge, and had found enough money to cover the latter's sidestake. And Inch, a business man always, had undertaken that first come should necessarily be first served.

The match was brought off at the old German Gymnasium near St. Pancras, before a crowd numbering several thousands – plain proof that there was a fairly large weight-lifting public even then. This match, in point of fact, launched modern weight-lifting. It marked the break between the old and new style, old and new appliances, Inch employing disc-loading bar-bells, Caswell the now obsolete shot-loaded type. There was no official body to govern the sport then, but due to this match and its aftermath (the “Britain's Strongest Man” Gold Cup Tournament), a ruling body came into existence. True, this had, at first, a dual identity, being comprised of both amateurs and professionals. Still, a start towards transforming chaos into some semblance of order had been made. The necessary sorting-out process followed later.

This match was also noteworthy for other reasons. When Sandow met Sampson, the tests set by the latter followed no precedent, being selected at Sampson's whim. Sandow and McCann certainly “lifted,” but under no recognised conditions. The Inch-Caswell match, however, was decided by six lifts, conditions governing the execution

of which were more or less universally accepted. And a further interest was added in that Inch had undertaken to beat Sandow's best one hand lift of 269 lbs. He did not succeed in this feat, for reasons into which it is here quite unnecessary to go. But he achieved his greatest ambition, for he won the match by a clear margin. So, for the first time since Elliott's victory at Athens, Great Britain had a man holding a world's weight-lifting championship title.

With a new interest aroused, quite a number of weight-lifting competitions were held, and more than one record set up in the years following. Then, in the early part of 1909, a new Richmond appeared in the field in the person of Edward Aston (also a Yorkshireman), who came forward with a challenge levelled at Inch's middleweight title. Inch, whose business as an instructor had, by this time, grown to mammoth proportions, expressed his readiness to defend his title, but made conditions – and supplied an explanation.

He had been, and was still, very busy; had more or less got out of lifting condition; and, as a result, had grown heavier. Still, he agreed to meet Aston, provided that Aston could prove himself capable of beating each and every lift put up by Inch in his match with Caswell. Aston, whose ambitions were only equalled by his confidence in his ability, accepted the terms, and made the attempt at the Agricultural Hall, Islington, then the venue of a new series of world's weight-lifting championships. But he failed; and then, for a short time, retired from notice.

Some most interesting developments followed! A remarkable German lifter, who claimed the Continental middleweight championship, arrived in England. He was a Bavarian, named Max Sick (later to be called Maxick), and, in addition to his weight-lifting abilities – which soon were shown to be considerable – boasted a singular gift of muscle control. That is to say, he could control the action of any muscle, or group of muscles, at will. He was unquestionably a phenomenon, and had come to London, so it was announced, to challenge Inch for his world's middleweight title.

This challenge hit Inch at an even more inopportune moment than Aston's had done. A most successful man, he was busier than ever, whilst his weight had gone up by leaps and bounds consequent upon the enforced following of a sedentary occupation. Moreover, he was now the holder of a proud title, "Britain's Strongest Man," an asset calculated to be of greater value to his business than even the world's middleweight title had proved. His profession of physical culture teacher was making such claims on his attention that to find time in which to train would have proved a matter of extreme difficulty. And, again, there was the question of making weight. Inch, obviously, was on the horns of a dilemma.

But the conqueror of Caswell was ingenious. He suspected, and probably not without good reason, that there was a little more behind the arrival of Sick than would seem evident to the eye of casual observation. So again he played a good card. He would, he said, be prepared to train down to weight and meet Max Sick, provided the phenomenal Bavarian would first meet and defeat Edward Aston. The opposition had

apparently forgotten Aston; or, if they remembered him, presumably reckoned him to be of but little account. Be that as it may, they agreed to the qualifying test. And Sick met Aston in a match for the world's middleweight championship at the Granville Palace of Varieties, Walham Green, on August 4th, 1910.

In the early stages of the match, Sick, who was putting up some remarkable poundages for a man of 10 st. 7 lbs. (for that is all he weighed), injured his shoulder, and, acting on the advice of Monte Saldo, his principal, retired, leaving Aston the winner. Whereupon Inch, looking facts squarely in the face, resigned his middleweight title in Aston's favour, and conjectured that the Sick campaign had met with defeat.

Actually it had, although the other side had by no means exhausted its ammunition. Another match followed, in which these two wonderful lifters were again the contesting parties. But it really took the question of individual superiority no further, for, held on December 14th, 1910, at a matinée performance at the Holborn Empire, the contest could not be finished in the time allotted. Sick was leading at the termination of the match, but this proved nothing, as neither man had completed a total on the full set of lifts chosen, these being eight in number.

Practically six months passed by before further weight-lifting history was made, Inch and Aston meeting this time to decide the vexed question as to who better possessed the right to hold the title of "Britain's Strongest Man." This, easily the most sensational weightlifting match ever held in this country, witnessed the defeat of Inch by Aston, the latter being obviously the best trained man as well as the more scientific lifter of the two. To Monte Saldo the winner gave the credit for his superb physical condition, and there is little doubt but what this credit was correctly apportioned. I have mentioned earlier that



EDWARD ASTON.

Middle-weight Champion Weight-Lifter of the world. Present holder of the title "Britain's Strongest Man."

Saldo was a trainer of more than ordinary talent, and only a few weeks were to elapse before he followed this triumph with another practically as meritorious, piloting Soguel to victory in his world's championship match with the celebrated Carquest.

In the British professional weight-lifting world, Inch and Aston have been, of course, the most outstanding figures. Their rivalry did much to stimulate a healthy interest in the game, the contributions of Monte Saldo admittedly appreciably assisting. In fact, without Inch, Aston, and Saldo, the weight-lifting movement in this country would have been devoid of much of the glamour that it threw out from the year 1906 right up to the outbreak of war. And although all three are now veterans, the example they set is still strong, while the influence they wield yet is considerable.

After the Aston-Maxick, Aston-Inch contests, the lot of sustaining interest in the game fell principally on the shoulders of the British Amateur Weight-Lifters' Association, the name taken unto themselves by the governing body of amateurs which had sprung from the hybrid association called into being at the end of 1910, reference to which has been made earlier. This the Association did by holding championship meetings year after year until the clash of arms naturally put a stop to its activities. It was as a member of this Association that I won fifty gold medals, fourteen national championships, and broke one hundred and ninety-two world's and British records, the majority of the latter still standing to my credit, despite the determined onslaughts made upon them by many ambitious men.

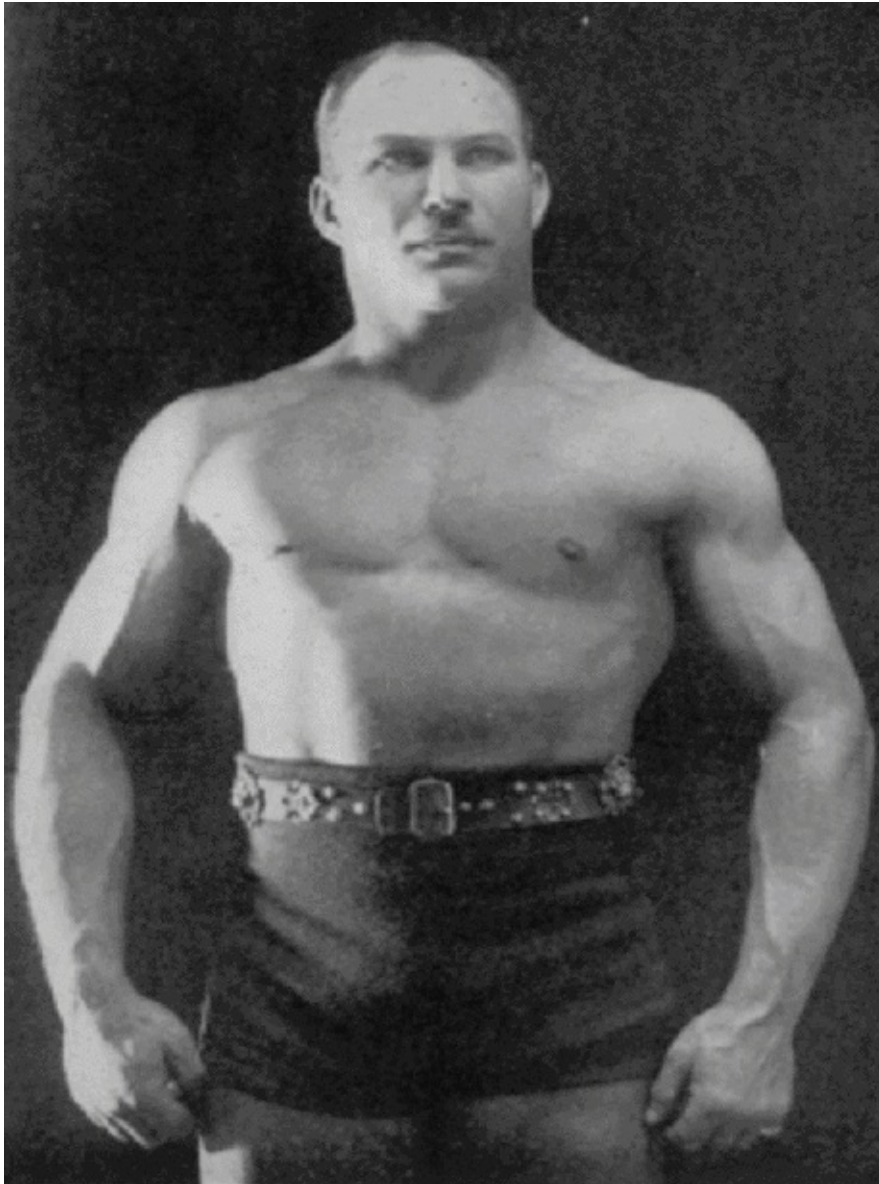
The war over, attempts were made by both amateurs and professionals to re-establish their respective organisations, with a view to picking up the threads of the business where they had been compelled to leave off. But this proved a superhuman task, and one in which only the amateur body has achieved any material success. Not that their organisation of to-day comes up to the pre-war standard, for this is most certainly does not. Still, it is functioning – and functioning very actively at the time of writing. Championships are being held, and new record breakers making their appearance, which is something that cannot be said, unfortunately, of the professional weight-lifting fraternity. But whether the tale of success will continue so one-sidedly, of course, remains to be seen. Sincerely, it is to be hoped not!

The reason for the somnolence of the professional weight-lifter is, without a doubt, the lack of public interest in his abilities so very manifest during the past few years, this, in turn, being due to the vanishing from the music halls, for the same length of time, of the professional strong man who first aroused that interest. So far as spectacular exhibitions are concerned, there has been no outstanding figure. Weight-lifters there have been in thousands – and there are still, as I can testify. But of stage performers of herculean powers there have been none for many years. Consequently, what interest there was has waned; therefore, the force of example not present, the interest that the newer generation would have evinced just as well has never had anything forcible to stimulate it.

Never, that is, till the beginning of last year, when another invader descended on these shores in the person of Alexander Zass, wrestler of uncanny power, animal trainer of exceptional merit, and professional strong man of ability phenomenal. Described as “The Amazing Samson,” this latest arrival has already, during his comparatively brief stay here, caused a revival of physical culture enthusiasm that bids fair to equal, if not outvie, the degree reached during the period covered by my story. Strange it is how history repeats itself! Always, it seems, it must be a foreigner who is destined to wake the Britisher from his lethargic state of mind concerning matters inseparably connected with his own physical welfare. Still, if Alexander Zass succeeds in doing nothing else as a result of his appearance here than this, here is one man at least who will be quite prepared to admit that he has placed us all under a heavy debt of gratitude.

Myself, I think he is a splendid fellow; perfectly genuine, thoroughly sincere, and

modest even to a fault. What I know of him I have been asked to recount elsewhere in this book. And after you have read what I have to say – things that a sense of fairness alone demands should and must be said – probably you will think the same as I do: that “The Amazing Samson” commences an entirely new chapter in the interesting story of “Strong Men Over the Years.” W.A. PULLUM.



SAMSON POSES TO SHOW A REMARKABLE DEPTH OF CHEST,
INDICATIVE OF ENORMOUS LUNG POWER.

THE AMAZING SAMSON

His Life Story

ASTOLD BY HIMSELF

PART 1

CHAPTER I

SINCE my arrival in England, many people have shown themselves greatly interested in myself and the display of strength that I give. "Were you always strong like this?" some have asked, just curious, and no more. Others have wished to know how they also could become strong, upon hearing that I was not always so strong as I am now. And numerous questions about my life and experiences I have been called upon to answer from time to time. So, because of this interest, and in an endeavor to satisfy it, I have decided to tell the whole of my story.

My real name, you must know, is Alexander Zass, and I was born in 1888, at Vilna, which is in Poland, so you will see that I am now thirty-seven years of age. Some people have thought me to be older than this, because I have not very much hair left on the front of my head, I suppose. They haven't said this, you know, being much too polite. But I can think of no other reason.

In my family there were five: two other brothers and two sisters. One of my brothers was very strong. But, sadly enough, he was killed in the war, or you might have heard about him, as he wanted to travel with circuses and show his great strength. One of my sisters was quite strong, too, and my father was also a very strong man. He is still alive, you will be glad to hear. He is now eighty years old, and can perform feats of strength although of this great age. A very wonderful man is my father, and so strict, too! I am going to tell you more about him now.

My father had charge of five large estates in Russia, where he had gone to live, and I used to work for him, and so did my brothers and sisters. As boys and girls, we spent our lives labouring in the fields, for we were a peasant family. We always had plenty to eat and drink, but all the same we had to work very hard for everything we got. I did not like this work very much, I will tell you, but as there was nothing else for me to do, I just had to do it all the same. I did not tell my father this, you know, for he would have punished me.

Now in Turkestan, which is where these estates were, the climate in summer is very hot, and I do hope you won't be shocked when I tell you that all day long in the fields we used to work with scarcely any clothes on at all. In this country, I know now that to do this would be though very strange. But we did not think so, as it was our custom. No one, therefore, took any notice. And because our bodies were exposed to the air and sun – which I have noticed you very seldom see here for long – we were always quite well. Also, our skins became harder than is the case when they are always

covered up by clothes. It is not good to wear too many clothes at any time. At least, that is what I think.

As soon as I was old enough to be entrusted with the work, my father used to send me long journeys on a horse with rather large sums of money, which I had to deposit in the bank to the credit of the princess who owned the estates. Many tons of corn the land produced, and when this was sold, with other things, the money had to be sent away. Sometimes my father took it himself. But after he had showed me once what to do, I was left to carry out this work for him.

My horse, I must tell you, was a very clever animal. He always seemed to know when the time had come for him to take me on the journey, and he was always very anxious to get away. So was my dog, a big wolf-hound, who came with me every time. He, too, was very clever, and I used to teach him to do tricks, just the same as I used to train my horse to obey signals. Both my horse and dog many things I could get to do without once having to speak to them. Animals always seemed to understand what I wanted them to do. Later, when with the circus, I was an animal trainer. And because I could teach animals to do tricks, I once got an opportunity to get more to eat when I was a prisoner of war. But I will tell you more about all these things in a different part of my story.

So my life went on! It was not a very exciting one, being still made up chiefly of hard work. I practically lived in the saddle, being absent from home for long times very often, as I had to journey from one part of the estates to others in order to see that the work on them was going on properly. I was now a great help to my father, and he often used to say how sorry he would be when the time came for me to leave him. For, I must tell you here, he had decided that I should receive a technical education that would fit me to become a locomotive driver. Before I could be this, though, you must know, I should have to serve as an apprentice in a locomotive engineering works.

But I myself had no ambition to become an engine-driver, or anything of the kind. In my journeys to the various towns with my satchel in which was locked the princess's money, I had seen quite a number of the wonderful circuses for which Russia in those days was famous. Indeed, all over the Continent these circuses travel. The life of a circus performer seemed grand to me. So fine the athletes and the animals looked. So strong the men, so beautiful and graceful the women. And so very clever the animals; the bears, the horses, the monkeys and the dogs.

So quite unknown to my father, I was thinking of circuses instead of thinking of engines. Of course, if I had said anything which would have made him believe that I did not want to do what he wished, he would have been very cross, so I did not say anything of the kind. He was, as I have told you, very strict, and would have thrashed me without mercy if I had disobeyed him. Even if he had thought that I might only be thinking of disobeying him, he would have thrashed me just the same. And he was indeed a very strong man, was my father; one whose temper it was not wise to arouse.

But although I never allowed my father to suspect that circus life seemed more

attractive to me than the work of driving an engine, he was to find that this was true in the very near future. It happened in a curious way, too! Quite by chance, as you will see.

One day my father had to journey from Seransk, where we lived, to a town about fifteen miles away, for here a big market was held on certain days of the week for the sale of horses, poultry and cattle. And at this market my father was to sell a number of horses. Fine animals they were, all bred on the estates. So big, so strong, so healthy looking, they would be sure to fetch many roubles. Early in the morning, then, we started away, arriving at the market-town some few hours later. Not so very quick could we travel, you must understand, for it was rough and hilly country.

As my father thought to do, he soon sold the animals, getting for all of them very good prices indeed. He felt very pleased because of this and said, as we had finished our business so early, it would be all right to go and have a look round the town, as we had plenty of time before setting out on our journey home. So we left our horse and cart – which my father had driven coming to market, I riding one of the horses which were to be sold – at a neighbouring inn and started off exploring.

We had not got very far when we found that, only the night before, a big circus had come to town and was just about to open for the first show of the day. Great crowds were waiting to go in, and I asked my father whether we also should not go. After a little thought, he said “Yes.” So in we went.

Now as you do not have in England circuses like we have in Russia and other parts of Europe, I suppose you will not understand how very interesting and exciting are the different performances that are seen in them. So I must try and explain a little, so that you will understand, for I think that you will be very interested to know about them. Besides, I have to speak of these things soon, in any case, as much of my life is of the circus. So better commence now.

Circuses, I must tell you, go always travelling, unless they are very big ones having lots of performers and a great number of animals. When so big, then they stop in the large towns for a long time, departing only when they have shown all their tricks with the animals, and feats of skill and strength with their performers. And as they are all very clever, having much what you call “up their sleeve,” they usually stay a long time. To work in these is good, for of money and food there is enough to go round, and yet a little bit more.

But with the smaller circuses, of which there are very many, things are different. Often there is little money and not much to eat. The animals must be fed somehow, for they cannot do their work so well when they are not properly fed. And as they do not understand why food is not there for them to eat when they feel hungry, they get sullen or ferocious, whatever is their nature. Then it is not good to be an animal trainer. It is very dangerous. If you do not wish to live very long, then it is all right; but not otherwise.

With the circuses are many things: acrobats, wrestlers, strong men, gymnasts, trapeze workers, clever swordsmen and knife-throwers, wonderful musicians, jugglers and conjurers, equestrian performers, magicians, freaks of nature, funny clowns, and performing animals. All of these you do not see in the smaller circuses, of course, as you will no doubt understand, and even in the larger ones, perhaps, you may not see them all at once. In my time, though, I have seen all these performers under one canvas roof. It is a great life, is the circus, to those who love variety and excitement – and to those who do not mind hard work and short rations.

But I must tell you of this circus in the market-town, or I shall be forgetting something that I can see now was really an important event in my life. Also, I think you would like to know about it.

Well, we got inside and sat down, and very soon the show commenced. First, there was some tumbling and hand-balancing, this being followed by a very clever display of bare-back riding by a little girl who could not have been much older than me. And I, at this time, you should know, was no more than twelve years old.

A wonderful magician then appeared – or so then he seemed to me. I could not believe my eyes, he caused such curious things to happen. The people were afraid of him, I can assure you. Perhaps you do not know, but the peasantry of Russia are very superstitious as well as very religious. They all believe in omens and signs, and anything that they cannot quite understand they will keep away from. I, too, was afraid of him, for I thought it would be very terrible if he turned me into a rabbit or chicken, or something like that, as he apparently did his assistants. I hope you will not laugh at me for saying this, for you must not forget that then I was only young, and believed such things could be done. Later, of course, I knew different.

But although I had been greatly interested in all I had seen up till now, what came after interested me still more. A very clever “dog number” followed, which I suppose I ought to tell you means an act on the programme by performing dogs. What the animals did in obedience to orders from their trainer was so astonishing that I marvelled. You will remember, perhaps, that I told you that I could teach animals to do tricks, my horse and my dog. But they could not do tricks like those I was now seeing. Oh, no!

Then came wrestlers – great, big, mighty men, with enormous muscles, yet so quick that, at times, the eye could not follow their movements. I felt I wished to be like them when I grew up. To look so big! To feel so strong! To earn so much money! In later days I found that this was not so. So big and so strong, perhaps! Much money, too, yes. But not for me!

Then, last of all, a real strong man, lifting weights ever so heavy, but also very easily. Many men, as well, he lifted on his shoulders, on his feet, and on his back, bending iron bars round his neck like little wires, and breaking chains by twisting them with his hands. And to see that what the circus-master said about them all was true, many people got up from their seats and tried to do the same, my father among them. I now

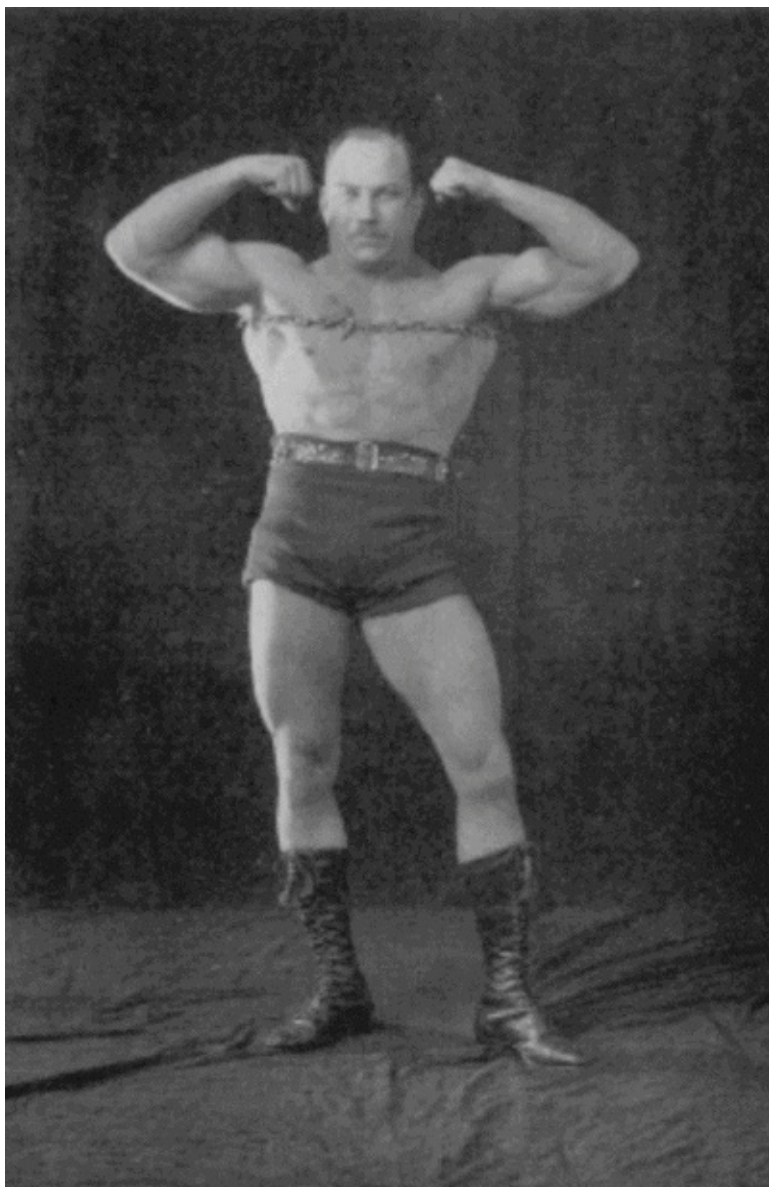
very much wished to get closer, but my father he said “No!” So I had to sit there all the time the fun was going on.

For in Russia even as in England, some people do not believe what is said in the circus or on the stage always, but wish to see for themselves. Also, just like England and other countries, many people think they are much stronger than they really are. As you say here – slang, you call it, yes? – “they kid themselves.” So when people who are not so very strong go up to try and lift weights which are really heavy, break chains which are very strong, and bend iron bars which are of hard metal – well, it is true that many funny things you do see. And so here at the circus could be seen this fun, this comic business. Very good! I enjoyed it all! But my father did not look comic. He lifted the weights higher than the other men, and also bent the bars of iron considerably. Only the chains he was not able to break. But perhaps he could have done even this, had he only tried a little longer. For he was very strong indeed, as I have told you before, was my father.

After the strong man's competition was over, the circus closed for a little while before opening again for fresh people to see, just as in England is done at the music halls, only more times, perhaps eight or nine times a day. I wanted to stop and go in again, but my father he said “No. You have had much pleasure, my son, I also. Now we go a little farther, look more about the town, then set out for home before night falls.”

So, very unwillingly, I left the circus behind me. But in my mind were all thoughts about it and nothing else. What my father talked to me about I do not remember, for it is impossible to think of one thing very much and pay attention to others at the same time. All that I could think of was the circus. This was the only thing that interested me. I not only wanted to be in it again, I wished to be with it and of it. Stronger than ever I felt the call of this wonderful life coursing in my veins.

Soon, our walk finished, we returned to the inn where our horse and cart was stabled and made ready for our journey home. But before departing, we sat down to a hearty meal, for we were indeed hungry by now. Afterwards, around a blazing fire we sat a while, my father drinking a liquid of which he was very fond, while I looked before me into the fire. For there I saw the circus. And as I looked at the creation of my imagination, a daring idea came to me: so daring, that I feared my father would hear my heart beating noisily and question me in alarm. “Yes,” I said to myself, “I will do it!” And excusing myself, with my father's permission, I left the room.



BREAKING A CHAIN ROUND THE CHEST.

(FIG. 1)

With the chain passed taut under his armpits, the ends attached to a steel anchor-hook, Samson makes ready to snap it in the middle by the act of expending his chest.

CHAPTER II

N OW when I left my father in the supper-room of the inn, comfortably seated by the warm fireside, my mind was fully made up on one thing; and that was, somehow or other, I would return to the circus and again see the wonderful performers. About the consequences of such an action I never troubled a bit. All I thought about at the time was the pleasant aspect of the resolution I had made, and how best I could carry it out.

Outside the inn, I must confess, I hesitated, but only for a moment. Quickly my

courage returned to me and I struck out for the circus, walking ever so fast in case my flight should be discovered before I had time to get out of sight. Travelling so, I soon reached the circus again, and found the people going in once more. Taking my place in the throng, I paid out of my pocket money the sum asked for admission and, all excitement, passed through the doorway to once more view the wonderful things which had prompted my disobedience.

As soon as the performance commenced, whatever thoughts of what would happen to me when my father and I met again quickly shifted from my mind. Soon I was too interested to think about anything like that, as you will probably be able to imagine. First one display and then another the performers gave. All just as clever as before, and several new tricks I saw. Not always, you must know, do the performers do the same thing, unless it is some speciality which has been spoken about outside to entice many people in.

All too quickly for me the performance came to an end, and for this day no more would be given, it was said by the speaker of the circus, as it was now getting very late. Whereupon the people got up from their seats and began to make their way out to go home. Then I commenced to think of what I was going to do. Truth to tell, I did not know. My father, I presumed, would be looking for me, and I did not wish very much to meet him, for certainly his anger would be great. So my mind was indeed troubled, as I expect you will be able to think for yourself.

Then, just as I was feeling so unhappy, the thought came to me that, if it could be managed, it would be best for me to stay in the circus for the night. Far better than going outside and meeting my father, or else be questioned by a policeman as to why out so late at night, a stranger in a strange town. For, I must tell you, the police would easily know this. In Russia, they know much more than simple things like this. Very well informed indeed on anything they wish to know, are the Russian police, as perhaps you have read for yourself some other time.

But how to stay in the circus without being seen? It would be very difficult, I felt sure; but still, the idea having once come into my head, I could see it was the best thing to do, so somehow I must find a way. There would be many places where I could hide, I felt certain. But whatever was to be done would have to be done quickly, as the circus was clearing rapidly.

So, a plan already forming in my head, I began to work my way across to where I could see some big wooden cases standing, behaving all the time as if I was looking for my father. (How glad I was that he really was not there.) Not many people paid any attention to me, and soon I gained the spot for which I had been making. And here, beside these cases, I halted and gazed about me. Not so many people were there now in the circus, the lights of which were, by this time, nearly all extinguished.

Nothing that I was unobserved, I slipped behind the cases and sat down, uncertain quite what next to do. Here I was when, suddenly, I heard voices coming nearer and nearer. Peering round the corner to discover what this meant, I was terror-struck to see

two of the circus attendants approaching with lanterns, inspecting to see that everything was all right for the night. All the lamps, I will tell you, had now been put out and the circus was in darkness. No excuse could I give if discovered, and I felt very frightened indeed. Yes, really, I did, and I do not think you will blame me for these feelings.

Quickly, though, I made up my mind. I would hide just where I was; take refuge in one of these cages which was open and lying on its side. So into it I clambered, burying myself beneath the hay and straw which it contained. Only just in time, for soon I saw gleams of light as the lanterns were swung around. But I myself could not be seen, so deep down was I concealed. After what seemed an age, the lights went and the men passed on. But I yet kept very still, in case they came back. No undue risks did I intend to take.

The men, though, did not come back this way again, and after a while all sounds except those made by the animals ceased. Only then did I stir to make myself more comfortable; and, very tired, off to sleep I dropped. Later, I awoke, and no one moving about, it seemed, out I quietly stole and looked around me. Not very well could I see at first, for it was still quite dark. But as soon as my eyes got accustomed to the gloom I could see that I was really alone in the circus.

So, cautiously, I started exploring. I was hungry and thirsty, and hoped that, perhaps, I might find something to eat and drink. But, no, I could not. What I did find, though, gave me cause for much delight. Right up in one corner of the circus, behind some chairs and tables, I stumbled over the strong man's weights. "Very good," I said to myself, "now I will be able to try my strength." But however hard I tried, I could only lift the biggest barbell so very little. It was a really heavy weight, just so much, no doubt, as had been said. I had believed this, it is true to say, but to know how heavy by trying myself was much better than being told. So different to try anything difficult to just hear about it! You agree about this, I know!

The animals, by now, were getting noisy, for they, like me, were hungry and wanted to be fed. To stay any longer was to risk being caught, as any moment now someone might appear to attend to them. So after one more look around to see whether I could find anything to eat myself – which I could not – I crawled round the edge of the circus tent to discover a place where the canvas would be loose enough to lift up and allow me to get outside. For quite some time I searched in vain, till I began to think I should never be able to get out. Then I found a spot where the ropes were not so tight, and lifting the canvas carefully, I peered underneath. No one was in sight, so through I crawled and stood up, very glad to be free once more. Over the hills in the distance the dawn was just beginning to break.

For a minute or two, I remained where I stood, undecided what to do next for the best. In the cold grey of the morning, things seemed quite different from what they had the night before. The wrath of my father I dreaded, for I had good reason to know it was to be very much feared. To return home, however, I had to, for nowhere else could I go.

What to do and say when there, I knew not. For what could I say? Nothing, I knew, which would save from chastisement and, perhaps, banishment from home.

So, heavy of heart, I set out for Seransk, fifteen miles away, you will remember I have told you before. Such long miles, too, they were, quite different from when riding a horse fleet of foot, as I had journeyed the previous day. Many times on the way I rested, thinking meanwhile what to do and say when some time I should arrive at my father's house. Nothing could I find to eat without stealing, and that I was not willing to do. Only water from clear streams was there free to me, and of this I was glad, for my thirst was parching.

About the noon hour, I saw my home and halted. To stop, however, was only to delay a little the inevitable. So bidding my heart be stout, footsore, faint with hunger and unhappy of mind, the remaining distance to my home I trudged, resigned to, but fearful of, what I felt was certain to await me.

To the gate I came, my manner hesitating. Overcoming this, though, by a strong effort of will, I pushed the barrier open and walked sturdily to the door, on which I knocked timidly, at first obtaining no response. So I knocked again, a little louder, but still no answer was given me. Unable quite to understand the cause of this silence, I knocked yet once more, this time much louder. To my ears there then came the sound of footsteps, which I recognised to be those of my brother. A moment later, the door opened, and he stood there, gazing at me in astonishment.

“What has happened?” was his greeting. “Where have you been all night? We have been very much worried about you, thinking you to be stolen away by a band of robbers. Is this true? Tell me quickly, for I am very anxious to know!”

But to his questions I returned no answers. Into the house I stepped fearfully, questioning him instead as to where would my father be. To this he made answer that he had returned to the market-town that day to see whether the police – whom he had informed the night before of my mysterious loss – had gathered news of me. Had I kept to the direct road in my journey back, I must have surely seen him, or have been seen by some police agent looking for me. But this I had not done, I must tell you, choosing to travel, whenever I could, through woody country, so that by scarcely anybody was I seen.

Having learned this, I then told my brother all that I had done, which both interested and excited him, for he, too, liked the ways of the circus, although, perhaps, not quite so much as me. He was also very sorry for me, being glad that it was not himself who was wearing my shoes, as you say in England. Many times, you see, he also had experienced the wrath of my father.

I was of a strong mind, upon hearing the place where my father had gone, to saddle a horse and ride to meet him. But my mother, who had since come in and heard all, advised me not to do this, saying that it would be much better if I went to work at once at my usual tasks, so as to soften a little my father's anger when he returned. This I saw

was much wiser than what I had thought to do. So after eating and drinking plentifully, being of both much in need, I set out on my usual work, turning my horse's head towards home only so soon as the sun had almost set.

Before it was quite dark, I arrived back, and after fixing my horse up comfortably for the night, got ready to face the coming trouble. As I turned from the stables, however, into the path that led to the house, my father I saw approaching. Evidently he had been informed fully of my escapade, for in his hand he carried a cattle-whip. That, I knew without being told, was soon to be plied about me.

Instinctively, my thoughts turned to flight. But my legs would not act for me. Fleet of foot as I was at any other time, now they were as lead. Quickly my father strode towards me, fury in every line of his face. His hand fell heavily on my shoulder, but no word passed his lips. Not until he had finished with the work of the lash did he speak at all to me.

Then all that had been in his mind came easily to his tongue. Such things he said to me that I really cannot tell you. To banishment in one part of the house I was to go, there to sleep and my meals to eat in future alone. And these to be not of the kind as always before, but just hard bread and water. For a long time indeed I was to be forced to remember that in his eyes I was very much disgraced.

So to the place directed I crawled, miserable, and in great pain, there to ponder over the folly of disobedience. To sleep was not for me that night, nor for me was there any portion of food. Of water, though, I had a large jug given me, and from this I drank greedily, for in my blood was a hot fever. All my father's strength, I think, was behind that cattle-whip which so many times had descended on my body. In the early morning bread was brought to me, and I was bidden go without delay to my work. The temper of my father had cooled much since he had so heavily thrashed me, but in his mind were no kind thoughts towards me, all the same. So only too glad to get away from the house, I went as quickly as bidden, not to return till night had fallen. Home again, I made my way to the room where I was to eat and sleep alone, weary and sick of heart and body more than I can easily tell.

I had not been here very long before my father came to visit me, which made me fear further punishment. But this time it was not to be anything that would bring pain to my body. I was, my father told me, not to do my usual work any more. Circuses I should not see in the future, for I was to go further south and tend the many cows, horses and camels which were on the estate that was the greatest distance away. And the very next day I was to start these new duties. Such were my father's orders, and they brought great pain to my mind. For the work, I knew, was very long and hard, even for a man, and not a bit exciting.

At daybreak next morning, my father came to me, and bade me rise and accompany him. On horse through the day we travelled, not reaching our journey's end till nightfall. Here I was handed over to the estate overseer and the story of my disobedience told. This was very humiliating to me, for I should, in future, have to

take orders from him under fear of further punishment from my father. Whereas, before, it was the overseer's duty to report faithfully to me and carry out my orders, when, in my inspection of all the estates, it came to pass that I visited him.

The following day my father departed, after having seen me set to work on my new and unwelcome task. This, I must tell you, was to take charge of very many animals and find pastures where they could feed. Also, I had to see that they did not stray away into other lands and get devoured, very likely, by marauding wild animals. You will perhaps be surprised when I tell you that, altogether, there were more than 200 camels in my care, nearly 400 cows, and over 300 horses. Not at the beginning of my work, I must say, but later on; just as soon as I had learned what to do were these numbers of animals given into my charge. These, though, were not all that were kept on the estate. Oh no! This number was only mine to look after. Others quite as many were tended by different keepers. But they were men, whereas I was nothing more than a lad.

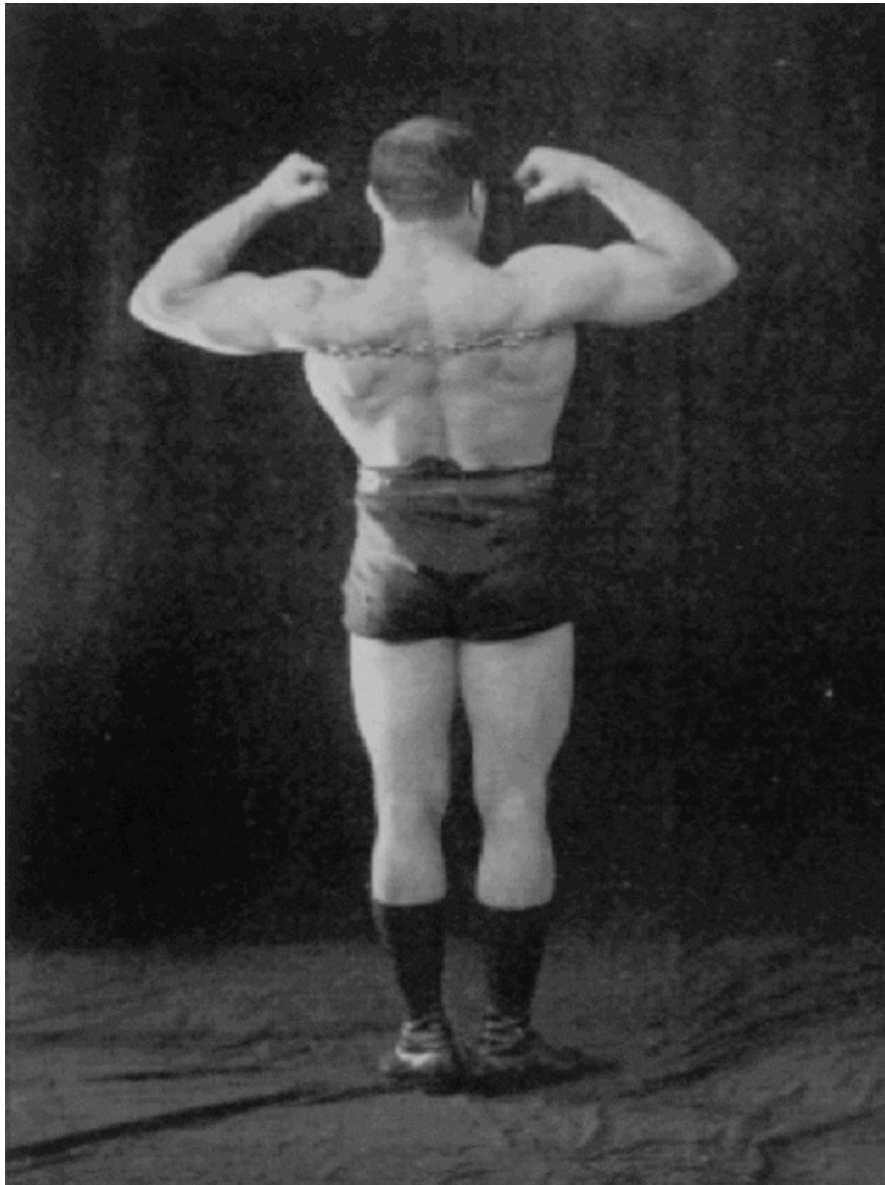
Here, during the summer months, I stayed, and as time went on, I began to like the work much better. Animals my only companions all day long, I sought to make them my friends, instead of thrashing them when they were obstinate and wilful. With the horses I could do this best, as they were the most intelligent of my charges. The camels and cows, as no doubt you know, are not so clever, and will not do things so readily as horses will. Camels, also, are very spiteful at times. But I always found some way to make them understand what I wanted them to do, being much assisted in my work by my pack of dogs, which accompanied me everywhere. Six of these I had, very ferocious animals to anyone else, but quite devoted to me, because I understood and was kind to them. Many clever tricks, also, I taught these dogs to do.

During all this time, the first summer I had spent away from home, my thoughts often went back to the circus and its wonderful life. Having opportunities in plenty, I tried to perform feats of horsemanship like I had seen that night, and other times, and succeeded, after many spills, very well. Because of this, I became quite as much at home on the back of a horse as most people are on the ground. Also, I used to wrestle playfully with the largest of my dogs, for the love of athletic exercise was very strong within me, and I used to make a practice of climbing very high trees, which first, I think, made me powerful in the arms and legs. From the tree-tops, too, I could see whether any of my animals were straying, which, very often, they did. Then I would either descend and gallop after them myself, or send my dogs to drive them back. This was one of the things I had trained them quite early to do, as well as attack, all together, any wild animals that threatened danger to the herd. Many times did they have to do this, sometimes themselves running danger of being killed. Then I had to shoot their enemies dead with my rifle, which, being a good marksman, I never failed to do. Many a bear have I disposed of this way!

Soon, however, the winter began to approach, making me wonder what I should then have to do. For in Southern Russia, you must know, we do not go to school all the year, only in the winter months, starting on the 15th day of November, and ceasing to attend after the 15th day of April. But about this I was not to wonder very long, for

instructions were received from my father for me to return to Seransk, there to go to school again. My father's letter to me was very kind, as he had been given good reports of my behaviour. And on the estate all who worked there were sorry indeed that I was going to leave them.

So to my house once more, ever so gladly I returned, my feelings being those that you will easily understand. It was indeed very pleasant to be back with my own people again, my father having now quite forgiven me.



BREAKING A CHAIN ROUND THE CHEST.

(FIG. 2)

Taken from the back to show the extent to which the chain cuts into the muscles before they are the least bit expanded.

CHAPTER III

Now in the schools of Russia, when I was a boy, children were not only taught those things which in all countries children have to learn, but, as they grew older, they received a technical education in whatever subject they had decided to take up after leaving school, this being when they were eighteen years of age. Most times, I must tell you, it was their parents who decided what this should be, just as in my case it was my father who had chosen for me the work of an engine-driver.

For although I had, since my return, been courageous enough to tell him that I was quite certain I should never like to do this work, my father still kept to his resolution and, naturally, I had to respect his wishes. But I could not bring myself to show any real interest in this work; and because of this lack of interest, I did not make very good progress in the instruction class, a result which displeased my father greatly. He did not thrash me because of this, however; simply grumbled at me unceasingly. Therefore, I told him that I could do no better, never, at this work, than now, for, as I did not like it, my heart would not go into my studies. Wherefore my father, very seriously, asked me what I really wished to do. Quite quick as thought came my answer that I wanted to be a circus performer.

At first my father was very wroth! But after a little time, he became calmer, and talked to me of the folly of such a life. "If such you follow," said he, "you will live to regret it. It is very hard, and only few succeed in making much money. More go hungry and cold than are well fed and warm. Take heed, my son, of my words, for it is wisdom only that I speak to you. Think not about the circus any more."

But although I knew my father to be very much in earnest, I only listened to him with my ears, and not with my heart, as he wished. In my own mind, I felt sure that, even though he believed what he said, all of his verdict could not be really true. Had I not seen with my own eyes the magnificence of the circus, and the grandeur of the life of its performers? Surely my father could not have taken so much notice of what each of us had seen as had I myself! How was I to know then that the eyes of the elder see farther than those which belong only to youth?

So because his consent to the circus life my father would not give, to my mechanical studies I returned, not to make much better progress, though, than before. I tried hard to interest myself in what I was taught, but not at all successfully. Others who were with me in this class gained much approval and more praise from the masters than did I. Still, I kept trying all the time, if only because of the wish to please my father. The circus life, it seemed, was not to be for me.

The winter passed and the summer came again. But I was not sent in this season once more to look after the horses, the camels and the cows. Instead, I was placed by my father back at my old duties, which pleased me considerably. Even more important work still was later given me to do, into which I threw myself with a great amount of energy. Anything to take my mind off the distasteful business of studying locomotives.

Now it was about this time that I chanced to see in a paper which came to my father's house good news of Sandow's book, and after reading this news, to possess one I very

much wished. So to Moscow I sent the sum required, this being seventy-five kopecks in our money – in yours, I think, about the same as 1s. 6d. would be before the war. In answer to my order, soon the book arrived, and immediately I began to study it. Very interested in all that it contained I was, I must tell you. Wonderful what it had to tell, then it so seemed to me.

In this book I read that if anyone wanted to become strong, it was exercise with dumb-bells that would make the body grow. But I had no dumb-bells, nor could I obtain any. Still, I must have some, I thought, for to get stronger than I was now was the great idea of my mind. So I asked my father for more money to get some of these appliances from Moscow or St. Petersburg, where were big athletic outfitters. But he would not agree to do this. “Strong enough are you,” said he. “Even now you are stronger than most boys of your age. And stronger still will you become as you grow older. Perhaps even I as am now will you be one day. Remain satisfied till then, therefore, possessing your mind in patience.”

But I could not be patient for so long, when from reading the book I could see that there was not any need. So I sought to get over the difficulty of not having dumb-bells to use by fixing pieces of stone to wooden sticks, with which I exercised regularly, as told to in the book. Soon my muscles began to get larger, so I fixed bigger stones on other sticks to make them larger still. And not always according to the book did I work exactly, nor to any one person did I say anything regarding my actions or my thoughts. I just kept my ideas secret to myself.

When the winter came again, I returned to school as before. And possibly because I now had something very interesting to occupy my spare time, the technical work at the school did not seem quite so hateful to me. Anyhow, I persevered, and to much better purpose. For where, the last year, the masters had had for me only frowns and reprimands, now they gave me words of congratulation. All of which brought joy to the heart of my father, who believed that in the mind of his son no longer dwelt thoughts of a circus life.

Whilst at school this winter a lot of my time was spent in the instruction sheds near to the railway. And one day the thought came to me that the leaden seals which secured the wagon doors would make fine material for me to construct dumb-bells not so clumsy as those I had made out of sticks and stones – which, now very much heavier, I still continued in secret to use. How to obtain these, though, was, at first, a puzzle. But soon I found a way.

To attempt to remove these seals in the daytime would only be a foolish action. For the officials would be bound to see anyone tampering with them; and that would mean dismissal, a flogging, and imprisonment. Night time, therefore, would be the only chance, I knew. And as soon as a convenient night should come, I was determined to obtain some of those seals.

Not long after, what seemed a very good time to make an attempt arrived. A very dark night it was, no moon, and much wind blowing. My family were all in bed and sound

sleep. So up I got, dressed myself, and, armed with a big pair of cutting shears, made my way to the sidings where, only that day, a row of wagons had been shunted in, to be opened and their contents inspected and delivered in the morning.

Having reached the sidings, I peered carefully about me and listened for some time, in case anybody should be on the watch. But no, there was no one about, so I quickly got to work, clipping from about twenty of the wagons the leaden seals which had been fixed to the doors by the railway officials at the station of departure on the line. Although there were more wagons than this, a greater number of seals I did not take, for, truth to tell, my courage failed me. Realisation of what would happen were I caught caused me to become suddenly afraid. And with this fear upon me, quickly I dived through the nearest open space between the wagons, and, fleet of foot almost as the wind itself, straight back home I fled.

Quite safely was my return home made, unobserved by anyone. Then I had to decide where I could hide the seals, which now had grown quite heavy. To bury them was the first idea that crossed my mind, and without delay I acted upon it. Treading carefully for fear of disturbing the sleepers, I made my way to one of the old barns at the back of the house, which was used only for storing food for the horses and cattle. And there, taking a spade, soon I made a hole in the ground and threw the seals into it. Quickly I replaced the earth, then made my way up to bed.

But not to sleep! Oh no! Now that it was done, I began to see how serious was the offence against the law that I had committed. For, when daylight came, the loss of the seals would soon be found out, and then there would be much searching and suspicion. What would happen, I could not know. But I could imagine. Very uncomfortable indeed did I feel all night, I must tell you.

Long before sunrise was I ready to get up, but this I knew it would be not wise to do, as quite different from my usual custom. So anxiously, I laid in bed till the hour came to rise. Dressing myself quickly, I busied myself on work expected of me before setting off for the instruction sheds of the school. Then, time to see about this, away I went, wondering what state of affairs I should find when I arrived there.

When I reached the sheds, a little later than usual, the destruction of the seals had been discovered, and the railway officials were inspecting the damage. Myself, I did not wish to be too curious, but through my comrades I soon heard what they thought about it all. Thieves, it was said, had been at work, intending to break into the vans, but had been alarmed before they could open the doors, and had therefore fled. What no one could understand, though, was why so many seals had been removed, yet not one door broken open. Very puzzled they were, I can tell you.

CHAPTER IV

AFTER the great commotion caused by the loss of the wagon seals had died down, I dug them up from the ground in the corner of the old barn where they were buried and

melted them down, making for myself two pairs of dumb-bells, one pair light and the other fairly heavy. These I used regularly, as told to in the book, with the result that my muscles began to grow larger. But very much stronger I did not become, which was much of a surprise to me. Then, perhaps for the first time, I began to realise that great, big muscles do not always signify a lot of strength, as so many people wrongfully think.

As time went on, I grew tired of exercising this way, for not only had it become monotonous to me, but, try as I might, I could not get the strength that I wished. Little else, I must tell you, occupied my thoughts now but the desire to become a really very strong man; one able to do things that even the average strong man could not do. So I thought a lot about discovering a way to gain this great strength that I desired.

At first it occurred to me that using bigger dumb-bells might bring this about, so I decided to make new and heavier ones. But not with more leaden seals! Oh no! I was not ready to take that risk again. So I got large stones and laboriously chipped holes in them, sinking iron bars into the holes so made, securing them tightly by pouring in molten lead. This was my old dumb-bells melted down again, for now feeling so very light to me, they were of no use for any other purpose. Some of these stone weights I made short, others much longer. Dumbbells and bar-bells they were in type, only, of course, of a very rough kind. But as they were the only kind I could get at this time, for my needs they had, of necessity, to suffice.

With these weights, though, crude as they were, I could now do much more, I soon found. Other interesting movements became possible, and I was always practising with them whenever an opportunity arose. Stronger, I must tell you, did I become because of this practice. Yes, very much so! But even stronger still did I wish to be. Not at all satisfied to remain just so strong was I, for to be satisfied with this was not to be true to my ambition.

Now taking a deep interest in bodily strength, I found out that, in my own country, there were men very learned in such matters, who were quite willing to teach people who wished to become stronger than they were. These professors of strength taught their great knowledge in physical culture schools in the big towns of Russia, and also by letters to those who lived too far away to come and study under them personally. To learn of this pleased me exceedingly, for I quickly realised how fortunate this was for me. So, at different times, after saving up my pocket money, I applied to three of the most famous of these strength professors to be taken by them as a pupil to learn by letters. The names of these three Russian teachers were Krelov, Anokhin, and Demetriooff, and all agreed to teach me. Anokhin, you should know, was then teaching his system to the great Georg Lurich, later to become famous as a world's champion strong man and a wrestler of international repute.

For quite a long time I practised the systems of exercise that these professors taught, making great progress under their tuition, and thus securing high praise from them. Much greater strength was now mine, and in Seransk I was looked upon as an

extremely strong youth. No one of my age could do the feats that I could do, although nearly everybody tried. In fact, there were quite a number of fully grown men, counted quite strong, who could not compete successfully with me in feats of strength, so much had I improved in bodily power through studying and putting into practice the knowledge which the three professors' letters had contained.

There was one man, however, living near Seransk, Ivan Petroff by name, who, although not so strong as myself all over his body, had an extremely powerful grip. Very great strength indeed was there in his hands. Objects that no other man could lift from off the ground unless both hands were used, he could lift quite easily with one. Iron rods he could also bend double by the strength of his finger alone. And because of his ability to do these things – feats which no other but professional strong men could do – he enjoyed a reputation that was known for many miles.

So I commenced now to think a lot about developing great strength in my fingers. Many things I tried, all helping, some of which I will tell you. I bent thick, green twigs with my hands, these being better than dry wood, which would not bend much before it would snap. I practised this a good deal until my hands became so strong that I could bend even small boughs of trees till they broke. Also I tried lifting stones off the ground with my thumb and fingers, carrying them in my grip for some distance. All this made my fingers so very strong, that I felt certain that the time could not be far away when I would not only be able to do all the things that this strong-handed man could do, but some, perhaps, that he could not.

For that was the one idea now in my mind! Not only to equal him in feats that required great strength in the hands, but to perform one, at least, that even he would try in vain to do. I liked not his mockery of my ambition, his jeering answers to my respectful questions. His pride I would lower soon, although only a young man, and the reputation that he held win for myself. Such was the resolution I made, and the extent of my determination.

At last I felt that my strength was great enough to challenge him, so I took my father into the secret, telling him what I wished to do. At first he only laughed, saying: "What foolishness is this that has possessed you?" but he ceased to laugh when I showed him what I could do. "Indeed you are very strong," was his verdict. "Perhaps strong enough to win a contest at such feats of strength. This we will quickly see."

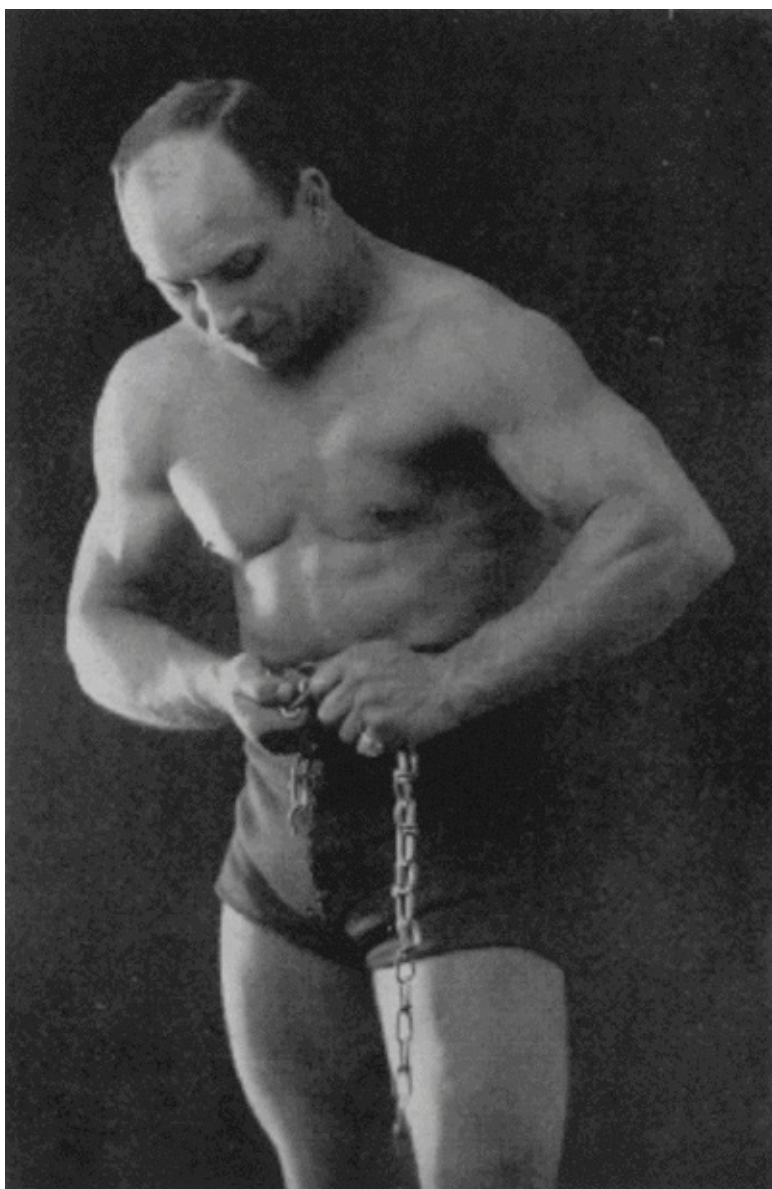
So my father and I talked as to the best way to arrange such a trial of strength, and it was agreed that it should all be left to him. Accordingly, when out in the village he talked a little of my powers, saying that, in his opinion, I could easily accomplish such feats of strength with the hands as had made this neighbour celebrated. But all that he said was treated scornfully, which, of course, was what he expected and wanted. So, appearing very indignant, he said he would be prepared to put a score of head of cattle behind his opinion, and as many roubles as he could muster. This brought a call from the man Petroff to ask my father if what had been told to him was true. "Yes, quite true," replied my father. "My son is willing any time to meet you in a contest of

strength, and certain am I that he can beat you. Are you willing to meet him?" To which question Petroff made answer that he was very willing, making no attempt to conceal his contempt for what seemed to him such a foolish challenge.

The news soon spread, and when the day of the contest arrived, many people had gathered to witness it, all curious to see what I could do, but all of one voice that I would be easily defeated. This gave much satisfaction to my father, who gambled practically all he owned on terms which would make him very well off should I win. Of his confidence I was very proud, but all that was at stake made me feel a little nervous. For if I lost, my father would be ruined. But I should not lose, I felt sure. I had a great surprise in store for my rival.

The first feat was to bend an iron bar about half an inch thick and a foot and a half long into the shape of a horseshoe, and this feat I succeeded in doing fairly easily after Petroff had started the contest by bending a similar piece. He then bent a long iron rod round his loins, coiling it about him, then unbending it again, a very difficult feat which, however, I managed with no more trouble than he. After this, he lifted an enormous stone clear off the ground, and I did the same. This stone, I must tell you, was banded with thick wire, this being fastened to a very stout handle. This was to throw a great strain on the strength of the fingers, and proved the hardest test undertaken. We stood on trestles to lift the stone, this being the way such feats are always done in Russia.

So far no feat that Petroff had set me to do had I failed at, and because of this there was much excitement. Everyone had been so sure, you see, that I should be quite easily disposed of, strong in other ways though I was known by all to be. And there was still the great surprise that I was going to spring at the right moment! Petroff, now very infuriated because of the mockery of the spectators, appeared at a loss what to do next. So to me it seemed that that moment had arrived.



BREAKING A CHAIN IN THE FINGERS.

(FIG.1)

Requested to break the chains at its sixth link, Samson proceeds to oblige.

A glance at my father told him what I wanted, and he stepped forward, holding in his hands a bright steel chain. “You now follow Alexander – if you can,” said he to Petroff, and handed me the chain, which I twisted and broke in the centre with my fingers after a long and hard tussle. My rival was nonplussed. Never had he expected anything like this. He took the two pieces of chain in his hands, examined them closely, then furiously dashed them to the ground, positively refusing to attempt this feat. “Alexander Zass conquers Ivan Petroff,” the spectators shouted. “Great and well deserved in his victory.”

“Stay,” exclaimed Petroff in a loud voice, breaking in on their exultation, “I am not conquered yet. Zass has surprised me by a strange trick. I now challenge not only his

strength but his courage also with a feat which I defy him to accept.”

Myself, I was more than a little astonished by the turn that matters had taken. That Petroff might also have a surprise feat in store for me had never crossed my mind, in which, I must confess, I showed myself a little foolish. I knew all about the bending of the iron bar and rod, for these were his favourite feats. I knew also about the lifting of the stone, for this, too, was a feat at which, up till now, he had been the undisputed champion. But no more did I know that he could do which others would surely fail at. What was this feat which he so scornfully said would prove beyond my courage and my strength?

I was not left so to wonder long! Some of the spectators were not agreeable that any more feats should be set, saying that I had won fairly. But others loudly voiced their approval, saying that the feat which Ivan Petroff had just challenged me to try must be the final test. Myself, I was rather more curious to see what it was than really reluctant to try. So raising my voice above all the others, I said I was quite willing to agree, also that I was ready. My father was of the same mind as myself. “Nothing that Petroff can do is beyond your power, my son,” said he. “Fear not the test, for your greater strength will surely triumph.”

A smile of exultation crossing his face now, Petroff came close to me, carrying in his hand a strange looking iron bar, of a kind which I had never seen before. It was a little over two feet long and about half an inch thick, and all along one side, and both sides at each end, were a number of file marks, making so many sharp points and edges. This, he explained to us all, he would bend in half around his neck, unmindful of the pain that he would suffer by the sharp points coming into contact with the flesh. Then, when he had done this, around my neck he would close it – and there it would stay until I entreated him to release it, thus admitting his greater strength and courage. The pain caused by holding each end, doubly sharpened, would not allow me to exert my full strength, even if that were equal to overcoming the strength of the bar. And both my courage and strength to perform the feat he doubted! So, mockingly, said Ivan Petroff.

This then, was the purpose of this strange and fearsome looking iron bar: to humiliate me in the eyes of all and accomplish the ruin of my father. My blood boiled! What a terrible test, I thought, for I knew that, apart from the pain, to open the bar after it had been closed was a far more difficult feat than to bend it into that shape. But what was I to do? My pledge had been given, and I could not go away from this, even had I so wished. Truly a clever trap had I walked into. One that seemed as though it would prove my undoing.

But quickly dealing with the situation in my mind, I thought this: If Petroff can so scorn pain, why not Alexander Zass? Is he my superior in courage? Never! Is he as strong as me? No – for this I have proved! Why, then, should I allow my heart to falter? So this, determinedly, I told myself I would not do. And I, in turn, knowing that a confident manner is of great value in any trial of physical strength, taunted him to

proceed.

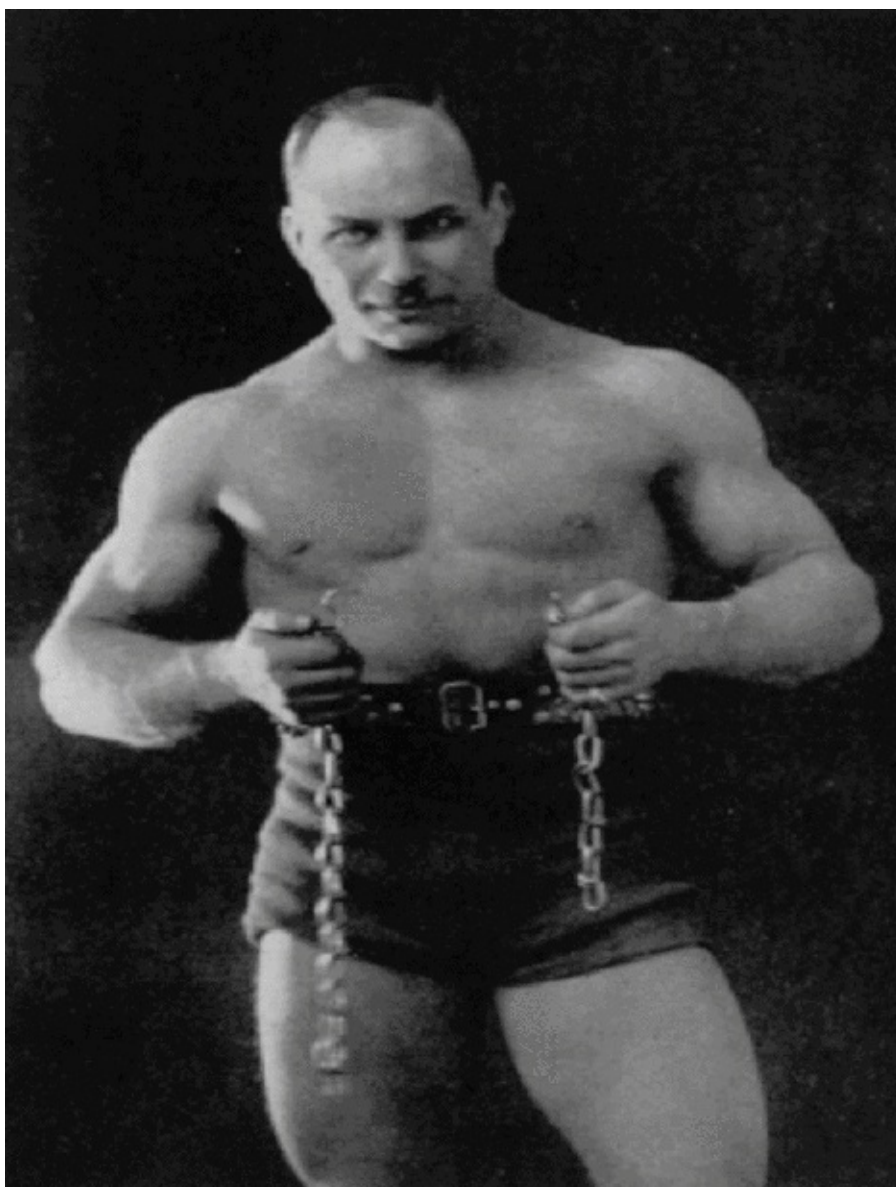
If I had thought by this, though, to cause him to hesitate, in this belief it was soon shown that I was mistaken. For quickly he placed the bar behind his head and, gripping each end firmly, bent it a little round his neck. That he was in great pain could very easily be seen, but, encouraged by the shouting of the excited spectators, he persevered till the bar was bent in half, just as he had promised. Then, regardless of the blood which streamed from his hands and neck, he pulled and pushed against it once more, bending it farther still. Not until then did he cease his painful efforts.

“I am now ready for Zass,” he announced, “if he is still of the mind to face the test,” to which I replied that I was yet of the same purpose. So, bidding me kneel, he drew the bar under my chin and commenced to close it round my neck. No gentleness did he show, I must tell you, squeezing it tight against my throat till I could hardly breathe. Closer still he tried to shut the iron loop, but his strength was ebbing fast. Therefore, certain that in his power he surely held me, he bade me stand, at liberty to release myself if I could.

The crossed ends of the bar, you must understand, were out of the reach of my hands, being behind my head. And before I could start on my task, I had to turn the loop round, which lacerated my flesh badly. Still, I did not flinch, and at last I got it into a position where I could grip the ends. Spurred on by encouragement by my father, and those of the spectators who wished to see me succeed, I strove to unclasp the iron necklet and escape from its painful grip. Difficult though this was, I finally accomplished this superhuman feat. Bleeding profusely, but every fibre in my body pulsing with fierce joy, I stood exultant. For I had triumphed, even as my father had said that I would. I, Alexander Zass, had shown that my courage was below no man's. Also I had shown my strength superior to the painful test imposed.

Wildly the spectators applauded me, while Petroff, much mortified, commenced to make his way from the scene. But I was not of a mind that he should depart before giving proof of his power to perform the same feat that he had so boastfully set me. “Tarry a little, Ivan Petroff,” said I, “for I am curious to see more of your deeds. Thinkest thyself strong enough to uncoil the necklet after I have bent it with my hands round your own throat? Myself, I think you cannot do it. Is your courage great enough to try?”

To be hoist with his own petard, as you call it, was something that Petroff never expected, and his face showed the surprise that he felt. But there was no retreat, no chance of evading the dreaded test, for the crowd were of one mind in this matter. “It is now Petroff's turn,” they shouted. “ 'Tis he who must now show his strength and courage.”



BREAKING A CHAIN IN THE FINGERS

(FIG. 2)

The task completed. *Note.* – On this particular occasion, the twisting caused the chain to become so hot at the sixth link before it broke that Samson, owing to the resultant blistering of one of his thumbs, had to

reverse the position of the chain.

Unwilling consent thus forced from his lips, around his neck I placed the half bent bar, and quickly closed it tightly to his throat. Tighter, perhaps, than he had closed it to mine, for I was determined that he should not easily escape. If he succeeded in opening the bar after my hands had done their work, then he would need to be strong and courageous indeed.

Painfully Petroff strove to rid himself of the iron loop after I had loosened my grasp, but all in vain. Beads of sweat stood out on his body, and from his hands and neck dripped blood. "Enough," he cried at last, "I am beaten. Unclasp the bar, Alexander Zass. Truly, you have fairly won the contest, and I acknowledge you to be my conqueror!"

Upon hearing these words, I sprang to the aid of my rival, for his power of endurance broken, he was in great distress. Seizing the ends of the bar that I had so mercilessly closed, I directed all my strength and energy to the work of unloosening its grip on his throat, for not a fraction had he bent it clear of the flesh. My hands lacerated, and my temples throbbing as if to burst, at first the bar refused to move. Then, slowly, I felt it give. And straining as I had never strained before, at last I wrenched it open.

So ended what I think you will all agree was a terrific test of the strength of the body and the will. In the pleasure of my victory, I forgot the pain I was experiencing, and gone were those tempestuous feelings of enmity towards my defeated opponent. For of spirit and strength he had shown a great degree. Each of us had striven manfully to conquer. But I was glad that it was Alexander Zass who had won, not entirely because of my own pride, but more because it had benefited the fortunes of my father.

I was now a great person in Seransk, although but a young man, and the fame of my strength travelled many miles. But my life did not alter much. I still devoted myself to my father's affairs in the summer months, and in the winter went to school, as I have told you before. To studying the mechanism of locomotives, and to learn the work of driving them, I was, of course, still bound down. But how I hated it! Difficult it is, to tell you how much.

At last the time arrived when I, now eighteen years old and stronger still, should say good-bye to school at Seransk; to the estates, working on which I had been so happy; and to the technical sheds which I had grown up to detest. But, as you say, it was only out of the frying-pan into the fire that I was going. For, now finished here, I was to go to Orenburg, a town many miles away, there to work six months in the big locomotive depot before taking over the post of an assistant engine-driver.

So one sunny morning, I set out from Seransk, bound for Orenburg, which I reached after some hours travelling, tired, hungry, and not at all happy. And as I slowly made my way down the road from the station to the locomotive depot, I wondered what life held in store for me in these strange surroundings. Unexpected and remarkable things I was soon to find out, in a manner stranger than I had ever dreamed. And about these I will now proceed to tell you.

PART II

CHAPTER I

I Twas with no feeling of elation in my mind that I walked down the Orenburg main street en route for the locomotive depot, for I regarded my entry here as the definite

closure to my ambitions. But, all the same, I will say, to the prospect I had fully resigned myself. Of a bad job I had decided to make the best.

But it so happened that I was never going to be called upon to do this so far as this particular vocation was concerned, for I had only proceeded about half the distance to my destination when a number of brightly coloured posters stuck up on a wall caught my eye. Striding towards them, great was my delight when I drew near enough to read to find that they were the advertisement bills of Anderdjievsky's Circus, which was performing close by in the town. "Very good is this," said I to myself. "Plenty of time have I to spare, so to the circus I will go and see the wonders that are being exhibited." For, I must tell you, the Anderdjievsky's Circus was a very famous one. Fortunate indeed I counted myself to be there in Orenburg on the occasion of its welcome visit.

So shouldering the bag again in which were my various belongings, the place where it was said the circus was I set out quickly to find. Soon, without any trouble, I found it, discovering it to be indeed a magnificent affair. Far bigger and more imposing than any I had ever seen before was this circus of Anderdjievsky. Many performers' names were shown and shouted outside; numerous animals, too, could be seen and heard within. Therefore, before the entrance I stayed but a very little while. My money for admission paid, quickly, I can tell you, I went in.

Soon, all too soon, it seemed to me, the performance finished, and the sight-seers got up to make room for those who were waiting to see the next show. But I lingered, so interested in all that I had seen that I wanted to see it again. Upon noticing my reluctance to depart, the ring-master came up to me, questioning me as to my intentions, for he thought that I sought to evade payment in seeing the display a second time. This, though, I assured him I had no wish to do, and handed the charge for entrance to the official whose duty it was to examine all the tickets. This settled matters satisfactorily, enabling me to stay where I was without further hindrance.

In due course, the next performance finished also, still finding me unwilling to depart, which again caused the ring-master to question me. This time, though, his interest was more friendly, and he asked me things about myself, also why I was so eager to see the circus show that I was willing to stay and pay a second time, this being apparently unusual. In answer to his questioning, I told him how the circus life attracted me. How I had always felt that I would like to be of it. And, a sympathetic listener found at last, the whole of my ambitions I revealed. Never for one moment, though, did I think that anything else would come of it but condolences and a few encouraging words, perhaps.

But to my great surprise the ring-master exclaimed, after hearing all I had to say: "Would you like to join us? If so, I will take you now to the circus-master and see if a vacancy can be found for you." Whereupon I replied that I would indeed like to join the circus. Nothing more glorious, it seemed, could there be than this wonderful life, an unexpected opportunity to enter which had so strangely come to me. So, all excitement, to the circus-master I was taken, who, when he had heard what the ring-

master said, looked me up and down and through and through. His examination finished, he repeated the question, which drew from me, I need hardly tell you, perhaps, just the very same answer as before.

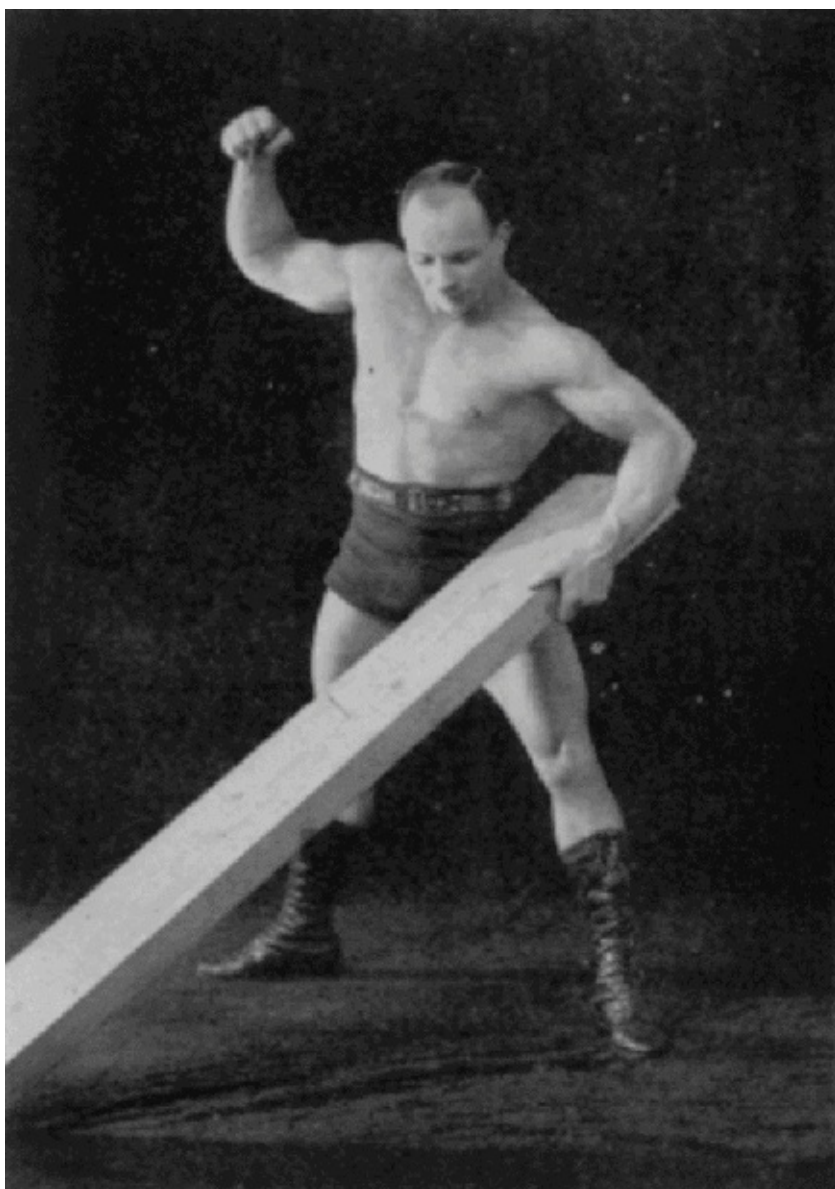
“Very well,” said the circus-master – the celebrated Anderdjievsky himself – “you can join us as a general worker. Whatever needs to be done, there you must help. The life you will find hard, mistake me not. Often you will go hungry, maybe. Many hours you will work, it is quite certain. Think well before you cast in your lot with the circus, my lad, for there will be no turning back once you have consented.”

Through my mind, as these words were said to me, ran the advice that my father had long before given me on this subject. Almost the same words had he said, whereat I had told myself that he surely was mistaken. Yet, here, from the head of the circus himself, came similar dismaying speech. Strange indeed was this! Was the circus life, then, a sham – one fit only for rovers and vagabonds? But I was not left so to wonder long. “What sayest thou, my lad?” said the circus-master. “Art thou still eager to join the circus of Anderdjievsky?” To which, without any further hesitation at all, I replied that I very truly was.

So into the life of the circus – the long conjured up life of my dreams – I entered, thus, in this unexpected way. But what of the locomotive depot and my father? Be not of anxiety about this. Of these I will proceed to speak in due course.

In Orenburg the circus stopped for quite some while, as, a fairly big place, good business was being done. Long before it departed, though, I had found out that, as you say in England, my life was not going to be a bed of roses. Hard, very hard, I worked, and hours just as long as had been told me. Still, there was a lot of excitement about the life, which helped to keep me fascinated. It was all so different from what I had been used to. So full of change and pleasant anticipation that the hardships were, to a great degree, forgotten. Anyhow, my lot had been cast, for good fortune or for ill. It would have been little use thinking of drawing back now, which, I must tell you, not for one moment did I think of doing.

With the circus, you must know, were a troupe of wrestlers, and also a stalwart strong man, giving an excellent show. Really a giant was this man, weighing about 18 stone, and among the many difficult things that he did was the twisting of horse-shoes with his hands until they broke. Anyone could bring up whatever shoes they liked. Never did he fail to break them. But, stay! Yes, once he did fail, I remember. I must tell you about this, as I think you will be very interested. You will excuse me, I know, if I miss previous events meanwhile, as I had better speak of this while it yet remains in my recollection.



THE NAILS DRIVING AND WITHDRAWING FEAT.

(FIG. 1)

Into a plank of wood $\frac{1}{2}$ inches thick, Samson enters a pair of 6-inch wire nails, one after the other, in the manner shown. *Note.* – The nail that Samson is about to drive in is the second; the first, it can be seen plainly, has entered about half its length. It was some time after the circus had left Orenburg that the episode I have just remembered occurred. We had been travelling for many miles, pitching our tent in first one town, then another, working the largest of the smaller villages in between, doing good business in some places, in other hardly any at all. At such times, the life was hard, and the circus-master's temper not at all sweet. All kinds of sensations we had to work up on the occasions when business was bad, in an endeavour to raise more money. Some of these I will tell you about as I go on.

We had, in the journey mentioned, reached a little town where it had been decided to

stay a while, as it was a fairly prosperous place, and the business that the circus was doing was quite good. And so, to get as many people to come as possible, the circus-master sent out bills, saying that to anyone who could last out ten minutes with the wrestlers, to him a nice sum of money would be given – and, if any stranger succeeded in defeating our wrestlers, more money still would be given. But not so many availed themselves of this offer. So the circus-master, therefore, was compelled to find some other attraction which would bring greater numbers of people into the circus.

You will not be surprised to hear, perhaps, that he turned to the strong man. Even in a country like Russia, where are so many powerful athletes, professional strong men always are objects of interest, especially if they are doing things which are not being done by everybody else in the same line. And “Kuratkin, the Mighty,” as he was called, was one such performer, his speciality being, as I have told you, the breaking of horse-shoes. He could, of course, lift weights and do many other things which only a very strong man could do, and these items he included in his show. But his great “number,” as we say in the profession, was the destruction by his hands of the horse-shoes.

Therefore, to make business livelier, the circus-master caused big bills to be posted up all round the town, saying that he would give a purse of gold to anyone bringing a horse-shoe to the circus that Kuratkin could not break. Also, for miles round, he caused smaller bills to be distributed in large numbers, so that the advertisement would be great. This brought many people in, some with horse-shoes which they did not believe could be broken, others just interested to see what was going on. But no one took the purse of gold away, for Kuratkin broke them all.

This went on for about a week, till one night, a farmer, who said he had travelled from afar, came to the circus bringing with him a shoe that he openly boasted Kuratkin would never break. Plainly he said this for all to hear, long before the challenge on behalf of Kuratkin was made by the ring-master, being half intoxicated with strong drink and evidently very quarrelsome by nature. The shoe he brandished above his head continuously while the other artistes were performing their acts, which interruption caused a deal of commotion. At last, though, Kuratkin came in to go through his performance. And immediately he entered, the drunken farmer, along with others after the golden prizes, speedily left their seats and made their way into the ring.

Altogether, there were about thirty men, each bearing horseshoes which they challenged the strong man of the circus to break. But he could not break them all in this one performance, the ring-master explained, as the strain would be too great. He would be willing, however, to break as many as six at one show, it was said. Therefore, the challengers had to cast lots as to who should be numbered among the six at one show, it was said. Therefore, the challengers had to cast lots as to who should be numbered among the six. When this was done, it was seen that the farmer was not among them, which exclusion caused him to become furious and shout that Kuratkin was afraid to match his strength against that of the shoe he had brought so many miles for the competition. Which, as you must know, was not true! For who can

say what numbers will turn up when lots are being cast?

However, such noise did this violent farmer make, that the circus-master took counsel with Kuratkin, after which it was announced that Kuratkin would depart from his usual custom of breaking six shoes only, and break seven, the farmer's shoe being the last of this number. To this, again, the churlish farmer would not agree, saying that his shoe should be attempted first, as, being sure Kuratkin could not break it, he wanted to get back home quickly with the money. So to save further annoyance to everybody, Kuratkin agreed to break the farmer's horseshoe first. Which was a good thing for the circus-master, this giving way of Kuratkin, as, shortly, you will see.

For when the strong man of Anderdjievsky's Circus took the shoe from the hands of this quarrelsome farmer, he never expected that the breaking of it would prove a very difficult matter. Why should he? Many hundreds had he broken before, finding none so hard that they would not yield to the pressure of his powerful hands. No need, then, to think differently about this one. One or two twists, and behold – in two it would be. So, no doubt, were the thoughts of “Kuratkin, the Mighty.”

But not so! Try as he might, the shoe refused to break. Not even a little could he bend it, which seemed very strange indeed. What uncanny spell had been cast over his strength that caused it to lie slumbering in his hands? Was he fated to be vanquished by the chance choice of a simple farmer, this mighty man of strength and muscle? Truly, indeed, it seemed so.

For fully a minute, perhaps two, Kuratkin strove with the shoe, but to no better purpose. Absolutely the shoe refused to bend, greatly to the astonishment of all the circus people and, naturally, to the joy of the farmer. The six other men whose horse-shoes waited for Kuratkin to try and break also began to look very pleased. No doubt they saw, in the eyes of their minds, a purse of gold possibly coming to each of them as well. But the circus-master had no such pleasant countenance! To part with many gold pieces was not to his liking at all, and by words of encouragement he sought to put greater power into Kuratkin's fingers, so that he might save both the prize and the prestige of the circus.

But all in vain! Kuratkin, it seemed, had this day met his master. Furious to a high degree, he pitched the shoe from him, saying that no more would he try, as it was bewitched. Whereupon the circus-master raved and stormed, twitting him on his failure. Which caused Kuratkin to say that he would try once again, but not until the other challengers' horse-shoes had first been tried. To this the farmer would not agree, demanding that he should be given the purse of gold, according to the promise on the bills. But Kuratkin's words found favour with the other men, also the spectators in the circus. So to the farmer's objection no heed was given. Such tumult there was, I cannot describe it, and you could not imagine it.

As soon, though, as Kuratkin commenced his Herculean task of attempting to break the six remaining horse-shoes, the noise died away like magic. “Would he succeed?” everyone was asking themselves. Here he had failed to break the first one tried. Why

should he not be doomed to fail with any or all of the others? And because of all these expectations, the excitement of the spectators was intense.

Soon Kuratkin showed that he was not named “The Mighty” without cause. The first shoe tried very quickly broke in half, and so did the second and the third. The fourth, though, gave him a lot of trouble, as also did the fifth, but, finally, he wrenched them apart. Perspiring freely, his veins swollen and his muscles standing out like an heroic statue, violently he strove with the sixth, and at last this went the same way as the rest. His ordinary task finished, and all his usual confidence restored, loudly he called for the farmer's shoe again to be handed to him. Which brings my story to that point where Alexander Zass comes in.

Now I, like everyone else who worked with the circus, was greatly surprised when Kuratkin failed to rend the farmer's shoe apart. Indeed, I perhaps more than most, for it was part of my work to wait upon him when he was giving his show, and take round for the spectators' inspection the things he used, so that they could see that these were not tampered with in any way. And one of my jobs was to supply him with horse-shoes to break, when no one came forward with any of their own for him to try his strength upon. For, I must tell you, always people did not respond to the ring-master's invitation. Therefore, Kuratkin kept a little pile of his own ready to hand in case of such an emergency.

Strangely enough, it was on to this little heap of shoes that Kuratkin, in his rage, pitched the shoe that so steadfastly defied his efforts. And thus it came into my hands, as I was called upon by the ring-master to pick it up and place it on a nearby table, there to await Kuratkin's attention later. So I did as I was bidden; or, at least, it appeared as though I did. But the shoe I placed upon the table was not the horse-shoe that the farmer owned! Oh, no! I had my suspicions about that shoe, it is my place to tell you. And the one I picked up from among the others was once that only looked like it. Bright, it was, new or almost so. And so quickly did I obey the ring-master's command, that not one single person noticed the substitution.

Acting on Kuratkin's order, I stepped to the table, and taking the shoe therefrom, placed it in his hands. Without delay, he once more summoned his energies to the conquering of this defiant shape of metal and, to the surprise of everybody present – except, of course, myself – soon, this time, it snapped in half. The dismay of the farmer was greater than I can tell you here. The look on his face, although so long ago, quite easily I can recollect now. And after the great surprise caused by Kuratkin's quick and unexpected triumph had passed away, a loud roar of applause broke forth. For in Russia, just like England, 'most everybody likes to see the best man win.

But the farmer, now much sobered, was not finished with yet! He demanded that the two halves of his shoe – or what all present with the exception of myself believed was his shoe – should be handed to him. He wanted to examine it closely, and so I took the two pieces to him. Wonderingly, he inspected each half and then, evidently quite satisfied at last, threw them away in disgust, hurriedly making his way from the circus,

followed all the time by the derisive shouts of the spectators, who loudly rejoiced at his discomfiture. No more was this troublesome visitor seen again, I must tell you.

The two halves of the broken shoe I immediately picked up and, after tying them together with a length of string, handed them to Kuratkin, saying that I had some information for his ears alone when he would give me leave to speak. I liked this strong man, you must know. When I first joined the circus, everyone was not too kind to me, which is the way of all communities with strangers, I have found in my travels of the world. But Kuratkin was not amongst those who treated me as of little account except just there to do their bidding. Quite different was his manner towards me, this always being kind and encouraging.



THE NAILS-DRIVING AND WITHDRAWING FEAT

(FIG. 2)

Both nails firmly entered, Samson, using still only the unprotected palm of his hand, drives one nail home to the head with a heavy downward blow, then makes ready to treat the other similarly.

Wonderingly, therefore, he looked at me, when to him these words I said, replying that I should accompany him even then to his quarters, where he was going to rest awhile before the next show. So away to this part of the circus we went. But not before I had taken charge also of the farmer's shoe from the pile where it still laid. Asked by Kuratkin as to the reason for my action, I replied that soon he would know. Not where there were ears that might learn too much was it the place to tell him of my suspicions.

The privacy of his own quarters reached, I told Kuratkin what was in my mind, and also what I had done. Wonderingly still he looked at me, taking the farmer's shoe in his hands as I spoke, knocking it with one of the pieces of the shoe he had broken, thinking it then to be the farmer's property. It rang true – too true for an ordinary horse-shoe, which served to confirm my suspicions.

While so situated, the door opened, and in came the circusmaster to congratulate Kuratkin on his saving of the purse-money, and also to reward him fittingly. Pleased, indeed, was the circus-master, as you can quite easily imagine. And to him, at once, Kuratkin told the story of what I had done, handing him the unbroken shoe to inspect.

The first thing the master did upon hearing what was told him was to sound the shoe in the way Kuratkin had done. “No wonder you could not break it,” he said, after testing it in this manner. “It is a specially tampered shoe, cunningly prepared so that the prize money could be easily gained. Fortunate indeed for both you and me that Zass was so keen-witted. Rewarded you shall be, my lad, by Anderdjievsky here and now for your attention to the interests of the circus.” And, so saying, he handed Kuratkin and myself two new gold pieces each. But Kuratkin refused to accept his share from the circus-master. “Not so!” said he. “’Tis the little Zass who alone deserves the reward. To him, therefore, let this share of mine be given.” And all four pieces of gold I thus received, so becoming, to my youthful mind, wealthy to a great degree.

Time passed, and we left the scene of this occurrence, travelling on in a circuitous way, Orenburg being again our objective. Much the same was the life of the circus all these days. Sometimes we did good business, enjoying plenty of everything that we needed. Others, we did not do so well. The latter more often than not, I must tell you.

I was now more closely associated with Kuratkin than before, for the service I had rendered to the circus of Anderdjievsky had resulted in my promotion. Previously, I just waited upon him, wearing a smart attendant's uniform. But now I was allowed to take part in the show, appearing stripped, and performing little feats of strength on my own account as well as in company with him. My ambition for this kind of thing had served me well. I practised hard, every day, and many secrets the great Kuratkin disclosed to me, all helping to further advancement. “One day, my little Zass,” said he, “you will be a very famous strong man, if you only persevere. Never have I seen one so strong as you for such a little fellow.” My weight at this time, I must tell you, was

about 10 stone. Not counted so very little, perhaps in England. But in Russia, yes! And against Kuratkin's 18 stone, very, very little indeed.

In due course we arrived in Orenburg, where a whole day was spent in getting ready for opening to the good business which the circus-master knew very well we were sure to do. The large crowds of people that congregated round while the making-ready of the circus was in progress showed this. This was not to be wondered at, for they had experienced the quality and novelty of this circus before.

And now for me was commencing a time of some anxiety. The six months that I had left home to spend in the locomotive finishing school at Orenburg was nearly up, and here was I, unknown to my father, a travelling circus performer. For, now I must tell you, I had never gone inside the place to report for duty, as it had been so arranged I should do. To my father I had written shortly after joining the circus, saying that I had arrived safely, also that I had entered into my work with all my heart and would later write again. It was true, too, what I had said about my work. But it was not the work of the locomotive depot. Still, my father was not to know this, being just as well for his peace of mind.

A way out for me was to come, though, as presently you will learn.

CHAPTER II

THE day after our arrival in Orenburg, the circus opened, into it streaming large crowds of people, all very glad to see us return. Good business we continued to do here for about three weeks. Then, as the attendances were beginning to dwindle away, the circus-master decided to move on, travelling in a different direction from before.

The six months that I should have worked at the locomotive depot had now passed by, and I knew that something desperate would I have to do, and quickly. My failure to report at the depot I knew would not easily reach the ears of my father. It would simply be thought in Orenburg that something had happened to cause my absence which was no concern of anyone there. But when no news of my transfer from the depot to the post of an assistant engine-driver reached my father, that would be another matter. He would be certain to make inquiries. And then what hitherto I had concealed would certainly be discovered.

What to do for the best I knew not. Very perplexed in mind indeed I was. So, after much thought, to Kuratkin I told my troubles, asking him for advice as to what to do. After hearing all I had to tell him, severely he reproved me. But as to what should be my action now, that he did not care to say. Besides, I felt sure that he did not want to lose me, so useful to him in his show had I now become, and so friendly were we together.

“To Anderdjievsky himself you had best tell your story,” said he, “for his counsel will be wiser than mine, perhaps.” So to the circusmaster we both went, and the facts of my escapade related. Like Kuratkin, he too, took a serious view of the matter. “The best

thing you can do, Zass,” said he, “is to return home and make a full avowal, trusting to the mercy of your father.” Which did not make me feel very happy, I must tell you. Although so long away from home, my father – and the mercy he would be likely to show me – I had not in any way forgotten.

And quite sure in my own mind that, though it might be the right thing for me to do, it certainly would not, by any means, be the wisest, I pleaded with the circus-master to be allowed to stay and travel with him away from Orenburg. But this he refused to let me do, tempering his refusal, though, with much kindness. “Sorry indeed will we all be to have you leave us,” said he, “but it has to be. Therefore, be advised to pack your things and return to-morrow, for on that day we leave this town.” And, nothing else to be said, so it was left. To Seransk once more it seemed I was booked to return.

That night, I must tell you, I slept not at all. Thinking in my mind was I what I should say when I arrived home. Truly, I knew not. What story could I tell but the true one? And to tell that – well! Yes, I expect you can easily imagine what I was then thinking. Much easier it is for you to imagine than it is for me to write.

Early next morning the circus made ready to depart and I to leave it. All my comrades wished me luck and a safe journey, and the circus-master added to my wages a considerable sum over the amount I had earned. “Every good fortune, Zass,” said he, “for you well deserve it. Really I wish you were coming with us, but this cannot be.”

Having taken my leave of all, off to the station I set, a lump in my throat and my heart seeming to miss a beat every now and then. To myself I thought: what an inglorious ending to my brave adventure. To return in disgrace, after six month of a free and real man's life. Still, what is written is sure to happen, I told myself, which is as true as it is sometimes hateful. And this indeed was surely one of those times, also I told myself.

The station I soon reached. But for a train to Seransk, a long time I found I should have to wait, which, in the frame of mind I was, could not have been better. So on to the platform I threw my bags, and on to a seat I dropped, for I was not only very weary of mind, but weary of body as well. And there I sat, it seemed, for hours, thinking of the circus now well out on its journey, and wondering what the future held in store for me.

At last I roused myself from meditation, feeling the need for action to prevent me from going to sleep. So I arose and commenced to walk up and down the platform. And in so doing, I saw something which caused me to stop as quickly in my stride as if shot. Another poster, announcing the appearance of a circus in the town of Tachkert – the Upatov Circus – caught my roving eye. And as I looked, so, a little farther up, I saw more posters of the same circus. Truly, it seemed, wherever I was to be, the circus I was not to be allowed to forget.

Before the poster I stood, deep in the thoughtful interest. The Upatov Circus, by repute, was well known to me, for in the Anderdjievsky Circus often talk about it occurred. It was what you would call here in England a “crack” show, as, although not

boasting so many performers as the one I had recently left, all that it did possess were “star” artistes, tip-top professionals in their own particular line. And the wages, it was also said, that these performers received, were greatly above those who worked in any other circus. Further, each artiste had to deposit a sum of money in the Upatov concern, which made it a very exclusive affair.

And as I stood there, deep in thought, a half-formed idea began to take definite shape in my mind. Why not, I asked myself, go to Tachkert and try to join the Upatov Circus? Far better such a step to take than to go home to Seransk in disgrace. Yes, the more I thought about it, the more fascinating did the idea appear to me. So, my mind made up, to Tachkert I decided to go as soon as the train would take me.

Upon inquiring, I found that not so long would I have to wait for a train, one being even now expected, so I hastily ordered a ticket, payment for which took but very little of my money, as the town was not a great distance away. Before long the train came in, and into a carriage I scrambled, all excitement, now not a bit sleepy, and eager for this fresh adventure. An hour or two gone and I arrived at Tachkert, the Upatov Circus quickly discovering. As keen as ever to see what it had to show, once more I mingled with the ingoing crowd, paid the sum asked for admittance, and seated myself right in the front.

What a show was the Upatov Circus! Truly its fame had indeed been richly earned. The circus of Anderdjievsky I had thought a most wonderful affair, but this, I could easily see, was in every way its superior. Novelty speciality acts there were in great number, the artistes



THE NAILS-DRIVING AND WITHDRAWING FEAT

(FIG. 3)

Samson hammers the second nail home. absolutely clever beyond compare. Many circuses have I seen in my time and more than a few have I worked with. But none so grand as the Upatov! No, this was, without doubt, far away the best of the lot.

The performance over, I mentioned to one of the attendants that I would like to speak to the ring-master on a matter of some importance. My message conveyed, a few minutes after I was asked to step round to where this official was waiting to see me. Without wasting any time – for I had already learned very valuable lessons in the ways of circuses and their officials – I told him that I desired to join the famous Upatov Circus. All that I could do I told him, and what I also thought I could do I included, for I was anxious to get accepted. To recommend myself, I stated that for six months I had been with the Anderdjievsky Circus, but wishing to do better for myself and earn more

money, I had traced the Upatov Circus, as with it I felt sure I was fitted to be. All of this the ring-master heard without saying much. Possibly he had heard many statements of a similar kind before.

Something about me, though, evidently impressed him, as he bade me wait upon the leisure of the circus-master, who would give me an early decision. Half-an-hour or more I waited for him, fretting inwardly, but keeping calm outside. At last the circus-master sent word that he would see me and into his presence I was directed. Well, I had got to the point I had aimed to get. My fate very soon, I told myself as I walked forward, I would know.

This proved true! Into the Upatov Circus I could come, I was told, but only on the same terms as I had been allowed to join the circus of Anderdjievsky, that being, you will remember, as a general handy man. But this, although pleasing for me to hear, was not all the circusmaster had to say! "Before you can enter the Upatov," said he to me, "you must deposit with me the sum of 200 roubles. Are you prepared to deposit this sum?" To which question I, for a moment, could really find no answer.

Two hundred roubles! Where was I to find such a sum? Truly, I did not know. Yet, without it, I knew that I could not hope to be accepted. What to do was sorely puzzling me. Then, into my bewildered thoughts, the voice of the Upatov master broke: "Well," said he, "do you agree? Are you ready to join with me on those terms?"

I sought for a way out of this dilemma as desperately as a drowning man clutches at a straw. "Yes," I answered, "but the money I have not with me now. This, though, I can had you within one week, if you, in turn, will allow me to join with you at once. No longer than a week need you wait. On this I give you my word. Do you consider what I say to be acceptable?"

The circus-master of the Upatov thought a while. Then: "Very well," said he, "you are at liberty to join with us now. But the money must be paid in a time no longer than you state. Otherwise, you must leave us at the end of that time."

"It shall be in your hands by then," I assured him, for to put a bold face on matters was all that I could do. But where the money was to come from, for the life of me I did not know. To talk so bravely about the procuring of 200 roubles was one thing. But to get it, and in a week, was a very different story, the end of which it seemed could be easily seen.

The interview with the master over, to my quarters I was shown. Here I ate and drank, then to the cleaning of some of the circus animals I was put. This finished, another meal awaited me, of which I partook ravenously, then retired for the night, there to reflect upon the dilemma I was in and the best way out possible to seek.

For hours I laid awake, troubled in mind. Then, joining my chasing thoughts, came an idea which at first staggered me with its boldness. Why not write home for the money? There it was, if only I could but get it. Yes, the more I thought about the idea, the more

I saw that it was the only one that offered any hopes. Careful would I have to be in what I said, I knew. Still, that was something which the next day could look after. And, so musing, to sleep presently I fell.

Early the next morning the circus began to stir, and as I scurried into my clothes, the lines on which I should approach my father revealed themselves to me. For my career, my father, you will know by now, cherished great ambitions. Hence his detestation of the circus life, which he considered offered to no man the opportunities of more everyday pursuits. Very well, then, it would be a job with excellent prospects that the 200 roubles was required to obtain. Which, to my way of thinking, was altogether true. Here was the job, and the prospects I thought I could see. No need to tell him that it was with a circus. Not at all!

So paper and pen secured, to my father I wrote at the first opportunity, informing him that the time for me to go away from Seransk had given into my hands a chance which promised well. A big concern had offered to take me in to learn the business, but required a deposit of 200 roubles as evidence of my good faith. The salary when I became skilled, I added, would be very good – much better than the pay of an assistant locomotive driver. And the fateful communication written at last, after several previous efforts had been torn to pieces, into the post-box of the circus it went.

Four days passed, finding me doing all kinds of jobs. Then the circus-master demanded my presence before him. “Well,” said he, “have you the money yet?” “No,” I replied, “but in a day or so it will be here, for to my father I have written for the money you require and he certainly will not fail me.” And, strangely enough, even while I spoke, my name I heard the letter carrier of the circus calling. “Zass” he shouted, “a government sealed letter for you.” Feverishly I snatched it from his hand and ripped it open. Joy indeed! In it reposed the money I had written for, and a letter of congratulations from my father. My troubles on this matter were over.

Now firmly installed in the Upatov, my way soon forward went. First, I must tell you, I was placed to assist Duroff, who, perhaps you may not know, so I had better say, was the most famous trainer of the domestic animals and birds in Russia. And not only of these, but also of rats and mice and monkeys.

Duroff's show was a very clever one. Indeed, he was one of the principal attractions of the Upatov Circus. To open his show, he used to summon his animals and birds by call and whistle, the cats and dogs coming in first, chickens, ducks and pigs next, then the monkeys, and last, his rats and mice. I expect you will be surprised to read about the rats and mice, but it is quite true what I tell you. These little animals were every bit as clever in all they did as any of the other quaint performers.

The animals and birds all assembled, Duroff would signal them to applaud the tricks of a little dog, the first performer. The other dogs would bark and the cats mew, the chickens would cluck and crow, and the ducks loudly quack, the monkeys chatter, and the pigs grunt, and the rats and mice squeak. Then, at a wave of his rod, every one would stop the same moment. It was a terrible din while it lasted, but evidence, all the

same, of uncanny skill on Duroff's part.

Two tricks the animals did I will describe. The rats and mice would all climb a long rope which went right up to the roof of the circus, at the top being a big mask., representing a cat's head with widely opened jaws. Into this mouth they would vanish, to come down the other side in a box, which was lowered and then placed in the train. But, of course, I have forgotten. I have to tell you about this also.

To end the act, a miniature train came in. Not so very little, you must know; just big enough for all the animals to get inside, the engine being worked by a strong clockwork mechanism. Then on to the engine two monkeys would climb to act as its drivers, the others acting as porters and the guard. The dogs and cats would get into carriages marked 1st class, the chickens and ducks into the 2nd class and the pigs into the 3rd class, the rats and mice, still in the box, being placed in the luggage-van by the porter-monkeys. Then the train would drive away, Duroff's show thus finishing in a very novel manner, always amidst loud applause.

With Duroff's show I worked quite some time, my animal training abilities causing me to be so retained. Much I learned in this direction from this remarkable man, just as I had profited from my association with "Kuratkin, the Mighty," when working with the Anderdjievsky Circus. Then, one day, the cashier fell ill, and I was placed in his position. This was a change for the better, so far as wages were concerned, but I did not care for the work very much, although I appreciated the trust reposed in me. And as soon as the cashier became well again, I asked to be released for work among the active performers, my wish being quickly granted.

This time, though, I was not put back with Duroff, but was included in the troupe of equestrian artistes. There were five of us in the act, and some of the things we used to do were riding horses at full gallop, standing erect on their bare backs and performing acrobatic and balancing feats while they were travelling along. Marksmanship, too, was a feature of this show, shots from rifles being fired at a moving target while we varied our positions on the horses. Feats of swordsmanship also we performed, and lance work as well. Indeed, all the feats you have perhaps read about the Cossacks performing – and a few that perhaps you have not read about – we did.

Then, later, I transferred to a troupe of overhead ring and flying trapeze performers. This work, I must tell you, I liked exceedingly. But I was only allowed to stop with the act just long enough to get good, then once more I was shifted, this time to work with the wild animals' trainer. The policy of the Upatov circus-master, you see, was to get anybody who seemed adaptable for certain work fitted into that work, so that, should any time an accident occur, or any circumstance which would rob him of a leading performer, all ready was a deputy to step into his place.

The training of the wild animals was quite a different business from Duroff's show. Very dangerous it was, always, and therefore more exciting. One or two narrow escapes I had, but good luck always stood with me, and I got free without serious

injury. I thought of the old times when, a few months ago, I was performing at the Waverley Market Theatre, Edinburgh, and a French lion-tamer there was badly mauled by two young lions. I left my own stage and made my way as quickly as I could to the scene, for I know how to handle lions very well, especially young ones. But by the time I had got to the door of the cage, they had beaten the infuriated beasts back with bars, thus enabling the unfortunate fellow to make his escape. No doubt many of you read about it at the time in your daily papers.



THE NAILS DRIVING AND WITHDRAWING FEAT

(FIG. 4)

The plank reversed, showing both nails protruding.

CHAPTER III

M Yapprenticeship with the tamer finished, into the troupe of wrestlers which

accompanied the circus I was drafted, for with the Upatov was one such troupe, just as with most other circuses travelling the Continent. Here I was mauled and pitched about, incidentally collecting the “ear” I now sport, which some people think is a relic of boxing. Not that at all! I got this decoration from a chap named Sergius Nicholavski, a hefty giant who weighed about 22 stone. Nicholavski was the captain of the Upatov troupe of wrestlers and when anybody required flattening out, he was the man picked upon for the job. He was, as they say in America, “some” fellow – and then “some.”

Altogether I was with the Upatov outfit for about eighteen months, travelling about from place to place. But not all this time did I work in the wrestling number. With them I appeared for about six months, then an opportunity arose which gave me a number of my own, one in which my heart was all the time. It happened rather curiously, too, this transfer, as you will see.

One night, we wrestlers, after a particularly strenuous performance, were gathered round the fire in our quarters, eating, drinking, and in our usual merry mood, when the talk turned on the subject of strength. Nicholavski, our leader, was, by common consent, the strongest man of our company when it came to wrestling pure and simple, for not only was he extremely clever in getting punishing holds on a man, but, as I have told you, he was a real giant, a most formidable fellow. But, apart from wrestling, we knew nothing of his powers, no more than we each knew anything about the powers of one another off the mat. No need for testing them in any different way had ever arisen, you see.

As befitted his position of captain of the wrestlers, Nicholavski had the final word to say on the matter. “You are all strong,” said he, “yet I doubt whether there is a man among you who can do a simple thing such as I will show you. Come, all of you, with me, and let us see.” So, as bidden, we arose from our seats and followed him, our way leading to the other end of the circus where, on their wheeled bases, stood a row of wild animal's cages.

When we were all assembled, Nicholavski walked up to one of the cages in which, restively and menacingly, paced up and down the king of the circus, a magnificent Bengal tiger. Muttering a few words to the animal to soothe it, our leader took hold of two bars of the cage in his sinewy hands and, scorning the ever-present danger of having his limbs torn from his body, pulled and pulled until he had bent both the bars outwards. “Is there any among you who can do that?” he said. “Really, I think not! Yet, this cannot be known till all have tried.”

We looked at the bars, we looked at the tiger, and we looked at one another. But no man stepped forward to endeavor to emulate our leader's feat. “ 'Tis enough,” one cried, “no man here but Sergius Nicholavski can do this. Only would it be a waste of time to try.”

But I was not so sure about this! As I knew, the feat of strength just shown was a truly terrific one, for the bars of the tiger's cage were very strong. But that did not mean that

it was impossible for anyone else to accomplish. Myself, I thought that our leader had spoken wisely when he said that not until all had tried could the truth of this be known. So, as no one else seemed willing to put their strength to the test, I decided to have a go myself.

Upon hearing this, all the company became very amused. But not so Nicholavski. "Stifle your laughter," he enjoined angrily; "Zass, although the smallest among you, has yet the stoutest heart. On, Alexander, and let us see what you can do. Your strength, I know quite well, is many times greater than your stature."

Angered likewise by my companions' ridicule, but heartened considerably by our leader's encouraging words, I strove to perform what he had done. The tiger I did not fear, as he knew me quite well, and, although infuriated, I was sure he would not attack me. So, worrying not about him at all, save to say a few words to him before I began, I concentrated all my energies and attention on what I was trying to do. And I found very soon that what had seemed so wonderful to the assembled company was not so very difficult after all. Quite easily I bent two bars of the tiger's cage apart. Easier even than Sergius Nicholavski had done.

"Well performed, Zass," our leader said. "Of all my band you are the strongest and the most courageous." But this was not to be taken just as said by my comrades, who, seeing how easily I had performed the feat, now were anxious to follow my example. This, though, they could not do. For the tiger, now roused to a great pitch of fury, threatened with paw and teeth any of the band who attempted to take hold of the cage.

But Nicholavski was of no mind to have the entertainment stopped this way, and he summoned the tamer, who kept the tiger at bay with a trainer's fork, while the remainder of the company, one after the other, tried to do what our leader and I had done. But although protected thus from danger, they tried in vain. Not one man of the band could bend another pair of bars an inch. And because they failed to succeed, they marvelled exceedingly. For the first time they became aware that in their midst they had a strong man who, as one such, had never before troubled to exhibit his abilities.

" 'Tis enough," said Nicholavski, after they had all admitted defeat, "Zass shall now show us whether he can bend the bars back till once more they are straight again." And, as bidden, I tried, not, though, with the same measure of success. But now encouraged by all, I strove and strove until, at last, I had all four bars running upright. Very high up did I mount in the estimation of my comrades because of this feat of strength.

Next morning the head of the circus sent for me, as he had been acquainted with the happenings of the night before by Nicholavski. And what he had to say pleased me exceedingly. In future, the Upatov Circus would travel a strong man as one of its leading performers. And that strong man should be Alexander Zass. What suggestions had I got for a special act? So spoke the master of the Upatov to me.

Thus questioned, I told him what I could do. Of my ability to bend iron bars and break

chains, I informed him, also of the strength I possessed in my teeth. And of the enormous power which I had developed in my chest, I spoke as well. This interested him considerably! "Very good," he said. "Put your show together and be ready to appear in three day's time. Meanwhile, anything that you will require for your use, do not hesitate to get quickly, for I desire you to have every assistance."

No second bidding necessary, I got busy right away. Bars and chains in plenty were quite easy to procure, as we were not very far away from a large town, and to fix up the other items also was not at all difficult. To demonstrate the powers of resistance that I held in my chest, I proposed to let all the wrestlers walk over me at once while I laid on my back under a wooden platform which rested only on top part of my body. And to show the strength of my teeth, jaws and neck, I proposed to hang from the roof of the circus with my feet in rings, while two of the heaviest wrestlers sat in a sling which I would hold and spin round in my teeth. These should be my main feats. Other smaller tricks – such as balancing a table on my forehead, on which was to be a man seated on a chair, playing a musical instrument – and walking on my hands on sharp nails – I intended to place in between for variety and to provide me with a rest.

In the three days given me I was quite ready, and appeared with instant success, which pleased everybody concerned, for it is only true to say that I was very popular in the circus. And as time went on, I thought out new feats and included them in my show, to keep it attractive and up-to-date. Needless to say, perhaps, I now earned much more money. Nothing like I earn these days, of course, but quite a lot, all the same. And as it came so easily, just so easily did it go. Not half so prudent with my money was I as I should have been, the folly of which I was later to discover.

As a strong man I continued to appear with the Upatov Circus until it finished, which was a very dramatic and quite unexpected happening, for it was destroyed by fire. One night, just before we were due to reach a town where good business could be anticipated, flames made their appearance in the animals' quarters, and almost as soon only as it takes to tell, the proud Upatov Circus was nothing but a heap of smoking ruins. Most of the animals were destroyed, and those that did escape the flames fled away in terror to the woods. No human life was lost, but we were all thrown on our own resources right away, for the destruction of this fine circus meant the proprietor's ruination. It was said that the fire was started by emissaries of another concern, jealous of the prestige of the Upatov outfit. But this could not be proved. If true, no trace at all had they left behind them.

After the disaster, seven of the wrestlers, including Sergius Nicholavski and myself, made up a little company and journeyed about the country, giving displays of wrestling and challenging all with whom we came in contact. During this time, we fared badly, often getting hardly anything to keep us going in strength for days on end. Very hard times were these, I can tell you. Then we had a turn of luck, which came about this way.

One day on our travels we reached a little village, and in the main street we saw a

poster announcing the coming of the Hoizeff Circus to Ashabad, a town not many miles distant. This circus, we knew, made a speciality of wrestling displays, and the troupe it travelled were reckoned to include some of the very best in the country. It was not such a rich concern as the Upatov had been, we also knew, but, nevertheless, we thought that it might offer a way out of our misfortunes. So, after discussing the prospects, we agreed to make for the town and see if we could fix up any business.

We reached Ashabad in the evening, tired, famished, and with not a single rouble between the lot of us. Here we found the circus running merrily, much challenging going on from the wrestlers, but few people ready to take them on. This gave us the opportunity we required, and Nicholavski and myself stepped forward and agreed to take on anybody that they liked to match us up with. The manager was not agreeable, at first, to let me go on. "Too little," he said. "You will not stay on your feet a moment with any of my men. Why, they would eat you!" To Nicholavski's appearance, though, he consented, for he thought, no doubt, being such a big fellow, that it would look a fine sight for his selected man to flatten Sergius out.

But Nicholavski would not go on without me! "We are friends," said he, "and we both need to eat. Also, we have five other comrades. And with the money we shall earn, enough to eat for all we can buy." This amused the Hoizeff circus-master, and so he relented. "So shall it be," said he. "But little money either of you will earn here tonight. Know you not the men you will be meeting? Why, 'tis foolish to talk that way. Still, we need competitors, so come along."

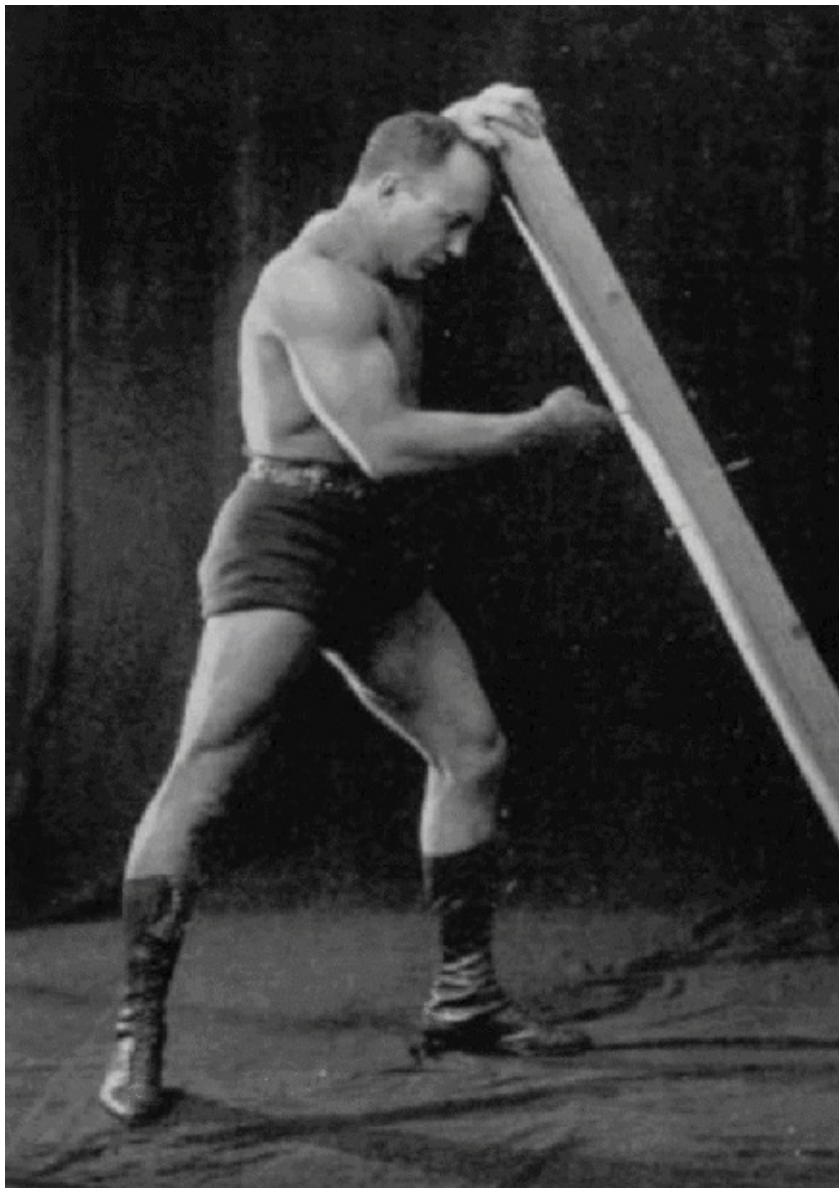
We followed the circus-master inside, passing on our way the men some of whom we should have to wrestle. Big fellows, all of them were, smilingly confident of their ability to stretch any man out powerless who was daring enough to match himself against them. But their looks did not alarm us. We had been through all this kind of thing ourselves, many a time, although they did not know it. On top of that, we were desperate, for both of us were hungry men.

Arrived inside, we were asked our names. But these we declined to give, preferring to be announced as unknowns. This caused a little more merriment at our expense, for it was thought that we were natives of some nearby village, noted there, perhaps, for our ability as wrestlers, and not wishing our coming defeat to get too well known. For to certain defeat it was told us that we were going. That, though, we said, was a thing to be proved.

After the necessary speech-making beforehand by the circus ring-master, we were paired off. Sergius Nicholavski, it so happened, had been given a man at least four stone lighter than himself, which caused me to feel sorry for his opponent. I, on the other hand, had been given a man almost as big as Nicholavski. Which, I must tell you, made me feel sorry for myself – or, at least, for my chances of winning.

The bout with Nicholavski and his opponent was taken first. Just as I had thought, it did not last long. Immediately they circled round, seeking for grips, our leader dashed in and, seizing his man round the waist with those powerful arms of his, whirled him

off his feet and crashed him heavily to the ground, falling with all his weight upon the astonished and luckless fellow. Almost before the bout had started it had finished, with the star Hoizeff wrestler stretched disabled on the ground.



THE NAILS-DRIVING AND WITHDRAWING FEAT.

(FIG. 5.)

The nails hammered back sufficiently to admit of a grasp of them being taken, Samson, using the forefinger only, prepares to withdraw them. This sensational conclusion to the contest caused a great hubbub

to arise, our men, who were spectators of Nicholavski's speedy victory, creating more din than anybody. After a while, though, order was restored and my opponent and I stepped forward, much amusement being created by the great disparity in our sizes. He must have been, at least, seven or eight stone heavier than myself. But it was not

muscle, I had noted, being more fat than anything else. And because of this condition I laid plans which I thought would enable me to defeat him. At least, I very sincerely hoped so.

As soon as we confronted one another, my opponent leapt forward, hoping to dispose of me in exactly the same manner as Nicholavski had his companion. I had expected this move and was ready for it. As he rushed in, I ducked between his legs, toppling him over, quick as lightning turning to the attack. But as fast as I got holds on him, so he broke them, for not only was he very strong, but he was as greasy as lard. More than natural was this slipperiness. His body was just as though he had anointed it with oil, which used to be a favourite trick of wrestlers in every country, until regulations made it forbidden.

Only a few moments elapsed, and he was on his feet again. And there, this time, I kept him. Every rush he made at me, I adroitly evaded, until at last his heavy breathing told me that now the time had come for me to again attack. So, passing to this, I soon had him on the retreat, and with a turn and a twist of the body I heavily threw him. Then, before he had time to recover, I was on him like a tiger, pinning his shoulders fairly to the mat after a minute or so's strenuous tussling.

The scene that took place was a never-to-be-forgotten one! So long had the Hoizeff wrestlers toured the country without experiencing any trouble in disposing of their numerous opponents, that they were considered almost invincible. Yet, here had come two strangers and vanquished the best men of the combination. Great was the surprise and loud the uproar at this unexpected happening. Our comrades, I will tell you, were so overjoyed that almost frantic did they go.

After the excitement had subsided enough to allow the ringmaster a hearing, the money promised was paid over to us, accompanied by a request to come round at once and see the master of the circus in his office. This we did without delay, whereupon he began to question us as to where we were from. Nothing further to be gained by concealment, we told him we had been with the Upatov, which caused him to be surprised no longer at our prowess. All the same, though, he found this explanation hardly sufficient to account for the defeat of his best men. For though the Upatov troupe were known to be the first-class performers, the Hoizeff combination of wrestlers, as I have told you before, was reckoned to be the best of the lot.

The Hoizeff chief was not long in coming to business! "As you are now free," said he, "you had better join with us. Even though I cannot afford to pay you as high as did the Upatov, far better it will be for you to come in with us than to remain just as you are, a band of rovers." Which was wisdom, as we saw. So, on the condition that all seven of us were allowed to join, we consented to throw in our lot with the Hoizeff outfit. Without any haggling, our terms were accepted, and we amalgamated right away. That night there was much rejoicing among us. For a little time, at least, the worst of our troubles was over.

With this circus I remained until called up for service in the Russian army, wrestling

all the time. Plenty of excitement we got, but precious little money. For there were now four more of us to share, three of the Hoizeff wrestlers leaving soon after we came in, the two whom Nicholavski and I had defeated being among them. Still, we made the best of everything, for it was no use complaining. And, occasionally, we had some fun. I will tell you of one such incident now.

In the course of our travels we had reached a place called Oktubinsk, where, previously, we learned, the circus had done very well. But this time hardly any business could we do. So, hard pressed to meet expenses, the Hoizeff master called us together to seek for a plan whereby we could improve our fortunes. After first one scheme, then another, had been put forward and thrown aside, Nicholavski hit upon a brilliant idea. "We need to create a sensation," said he. "Someone mysterious must challenge us. Get this done, and good business we shall certainly do."

The idea caught on, and Sergius proceeded to elaborate. "He had better be a Black Mask," said he – which meant that he would be a wrestler who would wear a black cover over his face all the time, so that his identity should not be known. Rumour would then give him many different names. A nobleman, Sergius said we could say he was, secretly, and this would soon travel about, as secrets always do, making it ever so intriguing.

Myself, I though the idea was a very good one, until Sergius, who was not only a very strong chap but a funny fellow as well, suggested that I should play the part. Then I thought it was not such a good idea. The others all supported it, though, and the Hoizeff master backed them up for all he was worth. "Zass is just the man," said he. "A splendid Black Mask he will make." So, no way out, I had to agree. All that remained was to fix up the details.

After a lot of talking and much laughter, it was decided that I should leave that night and go back down the line two stations, which was quite a good way off, as each station was a long distance apart. Then I should send a wire to the circus which would read: "Arriving such and such a train. Challenging all. Black Mask." The wire received, it would be stuck up outside the circus, and special bills would be printed to make the event known. This would take two days, during which time I would remain hidden in the village down the line, arriving at Oktubinsk at the time stated on the third day.

To strengthen the plot, it was decided that I should come arrayed not only in a black mask, but a tall hat and a dress-suit, which the circus-master agreed to lend me. These I was to take down with me in one bag, taking another bag also, but the second one empty. The idea of the two bags you will see presently, and I expect you will laugh. I am doing so now, anyway, although I could not see anything very funny in it at the same time.

Everything arranged, at night I left, having collected all the money I could from the company, which although not much was sufficient for my needs. Arrived at the station, I walked down to the village and got a room, sending off the necessary wire the

following morning. Then, the two days passed, I got into the clothes with a terrible struggle, and with both my mask and the borrowed hat on, set out again for the railway-station. Crowds followed me all the way, for in my make-shift clothes I cut an amusing figure. The trousers were too tight and too long, the coat I could not button-up and hardly breathe in, and the hat came right down on to my ears. Still, it was no time to worry over trifles like this. To me, the business was too serious.

At last I got to the station and there bought my ticket. The train was already in, and I had to make a run for it, for it was just about to move out. Blustering into the first carriage I could, loud shrieks from two ladies seated therein greeted my entry, they fainting right away, two gentlemen who were with them precipitately bolting through the opposite door on to the line, where they set up such a commotion that the engine, now on the move, was stopped, and a whole host of officials came crowding up and into the carriage, as the cry had been raised that a masked robber had entered the train, several robberies of this kind, attended with violence, having occurred about this time. Of course, I was able to satisfy them that I was no robber, but not without a lot of explanation. All the time that this was going on, I was wishing Sergius Nicholavski somewhere, I can tell you, for getting me into such a mess. However, everything straightened out all right, the purpose of my masking understood and profuse apologies rendered, away went the train, myself now an object of admiration instead of fear and suspicion.

Arrived at Oktubinsk, I soon discovered that they were not going to let the mysterious visitor step into the town without giving him a hearty welcome. A deputation of the town's officials was waiting for me on the platform, and outside a brass band stood ready to play me on my way. So behind this I fell in, surrounded by the officials, all gay in gold lace and bright uniforms, and to the tune of martial music off we set for the circus. My bags, which were very heavy, being each full of stones, to give the impression that I had plenty of valuable property, were taken and carried for me by ardent admirers.

As soon as we came in sight of our destination, I could see all the wrestlers lined-up outside, in front of them, as was only natural, the master of the outfit. Here reached, we halted, and I stepped forward, but was not able to make myself heard for the cheering of the immense crowd which had gathered. After this had died down a little, I delivered my challenge in person, much to the merriment of my comrades, who were openly laughing at my comical appearance.

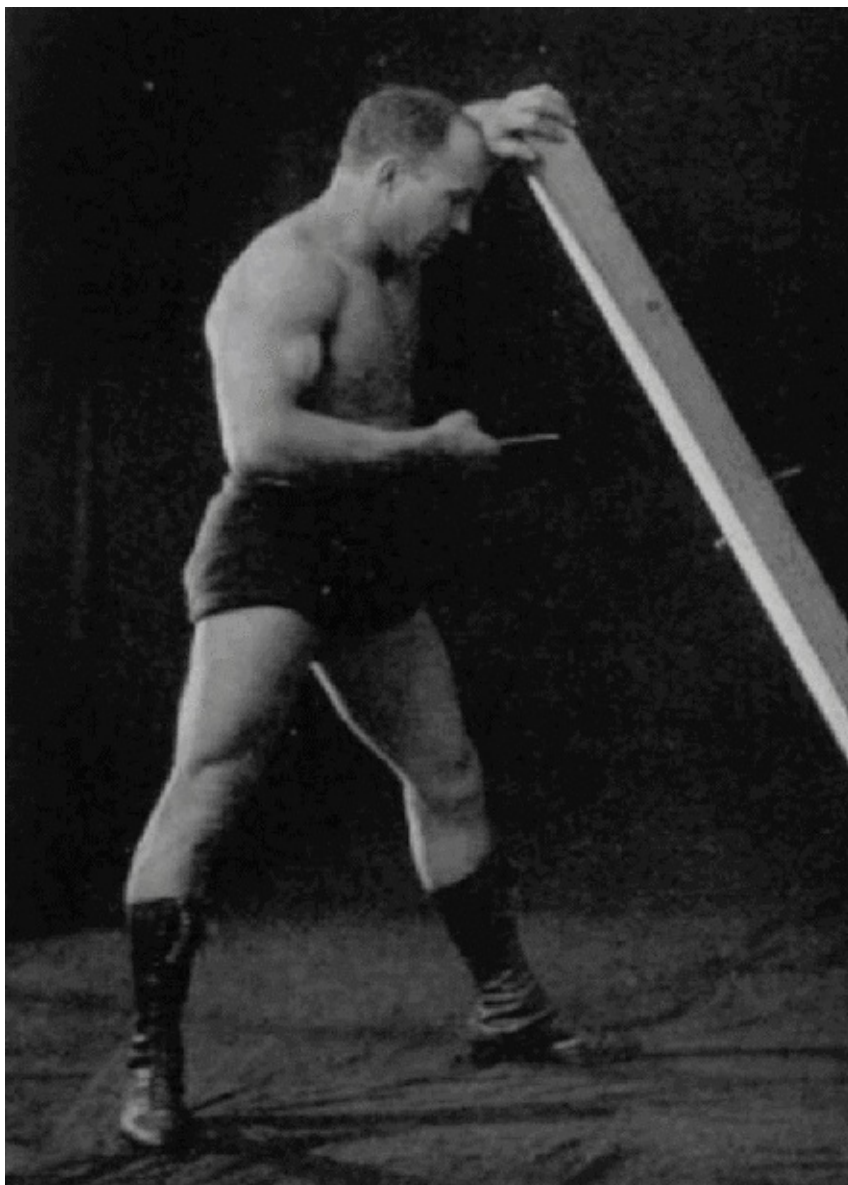
After I had finished, Sergius Nicholavski stepped forward and, on behalf of the troupe, accepted the challenge, saying I was quite at liberty to pick an opponent where I liked. So, deciding to have a little of my own back, I picked him, which caused him some surprise, as this had not been arranged at all, the plan being that I should choose one from among the troupe whom I could easily defeat. Nicholavski, I knew, I could not defeat. But, all the same, I meant to put him through it as far as I possibly could.

The contest fixed up for the night, off to the best hotel in the town I was taken, and

there regaled on the fat of the land. Strictly speaking, if I had been the serious challenger that I was supposed to be, it would never have done to eat and drink as much as I did. But as I had not had such fare for many a long day, I decided to make the most of my opportunity. Very well I did myself here, as you say in England, I must tell you.

Night came, and off to the circus I went, accompanied by most of the officials who had met me in the morning and some more who had visited me since, all seeming to make my appearance in the town a welcome excuse for a holiday. Once inside, I was really amazed to see the crowd that had turned up to witness the contest. Good business the circus was doing that night. Much better than it had ever done before.

The minor bouts off, the spectators now got ready for the contest between the champion of the Hoizeff troupe and the daring, mysterious challenger. The brass band was again on duty, and after Nicholavski had made his entrance and bowed, in behind it again I fell and was marched right round the circus, the cheering of me being loud and long. All the time this was going on, Sergius regarded me with a very amused air. I suppose he was thinking how funny I had looked with the tall hat resting on my ears. "All right, friend Sergius," I said to myself, "you just wait till I come to grips with you! I will make you remember this occasion."



THE NAILS-DRIVING
AND WITHDRAWING FEAT.
(FIG. 6.)

The first nail withdrawn. *Note.* – The nail is released by a steady pull, no see-sawing movement being employed. It will be observed that the nail is straight.

The parade finished and the introduction over, we took the mat

and circled round each other, seeking for an opening. Nicholavski, not so alert as he would have been with a real challenger, soon gave me one and I dashed in, got a secure hold on him and threw him heavily, following up my success with another hold that bade fair to break his neck. Surprised indeed, he endeavoured to extricate himself, at first without avail. Then, relaxing a little, I gave him the opportunity he was waiting for, and throwing me off, he quickly regained his feet.

I now led him a nice dance, pulling out every trick I knew until his patience was quite exhausted, “It is time I put you down, Alexander,” he whispered in my ear, as we came near enough together to speak without being heard. “Is it?” I replied. “I was just

thinking the same about you.” “What ails you?” was his amazed rejoinder. “Have you gone mad?” But I answered him not except to attack more violently than before.

Now on his mettle, Sergius responded to my mood, and soon a very fierce bout was in progress. First one obtained the advantage, then the other, neither, though, being able to pin his opponent. Myself, really I did not expect to defeat Sergius, as he was too big and strong and clever. All I hoped to do was to prevent him pinning me and, in the struggle, make him realise that I might be a better wrestler than even he had previously given me credit for.

My hope was realised. At the end of ten minutes, the time limit, Sergius had failed to put my shoulders to the floor, and the forfeit money was due to me. How this was going to be paid, I did not quite know. My only hope was that enough money had been taken at the doors to make the payment possible. Otherwise, there would be trouble. Not that I should make this, understand, for, after all, I was but an actor in the scheme. The spectators did not know this, though, and failing the presentation of the money, they would be sure to become ugly of temper, I knew.

But on this score there was no need to worry, I found, for the money was paid over without excuse, and back to the hotel I went to finish up a very good time. Then, next day, I left, my stay at the place having cost me not a single rouble, for to allow me to pay for anything the proprietor would not hear. A guest of honour I had arrived, and a guest of honour I departed, escorted to the station again by the band and even more officials than before. Back to the little station down the line I went, changed into my old clothes, and returned at night to the circus. But no more did I wrestle in public while it remained at Oktubinsk, for to do so would have meant my recognition.

We all had a good laugh over the happenings of the day before when I came back to the circus, when, of course, I handed over the money I had received to the master of the Hoizeff. Sergius was inclined, at first, to be a little bad-tempered with me for making the bout so fierce. But his natural good humour soon returned, and we remained, as we had all along been, the very best of friends. He was a great fellow, unfortunately losing his life very early in the world war. My own experiences in this I am going to tell you of later.

Not so very long after the masked wrestler incident, the time for my service in the Russian army drew nigh, and I left the Hoizeff Circus, journeying back to Vilna, as required by military law, as there, where I was born, I should have to enlist. This was a very long journey, taking the whole of twenty-three days and nights. Examined there, I was, because of my knowledge of Southern Russian language and customs, sent back to that part of the country, a soldier in the 12th Turkestan Rifle Regiment, which was posted for duty on the Persian frontier.

Arrived here, I entered the N.C.O.'s school, passing out finally a sergeant-major. Plenty of thrills we all got here, as the Persians were always fighting, either with us or among themselves. Which reminds me of one of their customs, a rather curious one, of which you may possibly not have heard. At sunset, however fiercely they may have

been fighting all day, they would stop and pray, ceasing hostilities all through the night. But only for the night! Next morning, at sunrise, off they would go again, just as full of war spirit as ever.

Of this part of my life I could speak a good deal, but as I shall have quite a lot to say later of a very similar nature, I propose to pass over this, simply mentioning as I go that here I became one of the chiefs of the gymnastic staff and physical training school, learning here also to become an even more skillful horseman than before. Wrestling, naturally, I still followed, becoming very soon the acknowledged champion of this part of the Russian military command.

My period of service over, I journeyed to Cymbirsk, where a post had been offered me as trainer to twelve women athletes, who were preparing for a wrestling championship. This work, although a little strange to what I had been accustomed, I carried out satisfactorily, then left to take over the management of a cinema, which my father had helped me to buy at a place called Krasnoslobdsk. This, I am sorry to say, proved a financial failure, and so once more I turned my attention to the strong man business, as in this I was convinced my future lay.

With the assistance of a comrade named Michel Krapeven, whom I had met at Cymbirsk, I put together one of the most attractive and sensational strong acts that, up till then, had ever been seen. New feats I had in plenty, and after the show had been witnessed by agents representing several of the big circuses, offers of engagements began to come in, its success being thus quite assured. Then, just as it seemed that I was due to enter on a career that would bring me fame and prosperity, the thing happened which all of us who lived on the European continent daily lived in dread of. War – the great war – broke out! Hurriedly mobilisation took place, and I was one of the first to be swept up in the net of the military machine. Where would the call to arms lead me? Continue, reader, and you will see.

PART III

CHAPTER I

WHEN war broke out, I was drafted at once into the 180th Vindavski, a cavalry regiment, whose function was to keep in touch with the enemy and convey news of their movements to the Russian infantry, a kind of intelligence, or scouting regiment, if you will understand it better that way. Entrained, rapidly we were rushed to the Austrian front, detraining at a place called Kublin, where we first established contact with the enemy.

At first, all we swept before us, moving forward rapidly and crushing everything in our path. Before long, we were no less than 180 miles into Austria, where a great battle was fought, the enemy having rallied with the object of making one last desperate effort to stem our victorious advance. And, better armed than were our fellows, and stiffened also by German front-line troops, they succeeded. Long and bitter the battle raged, both sides, at last, being glad to let it lull in order to rest their

sadly depleted forces.

But so far as the actual fighting was concerned, I, from this time, ceased to be an active combatant. For the big clash of the armies had not long occurred before I was out of action, being badly wounded in both legs by shrapnel, my horse being blown to bits beneath me. When I came to, I was in the hands of the Austrians, a prisoner; unconscious as to what my fate would be, and, truth to tell, not caring very much, as I was suffering great agony.

My captors, though, I soon found out, were not such terrible fellows after all. It may be, of course, that more kindness was shown me as I was an officer. (I have omitted to tell you previously that, three days out, I had been made lieutenant on the field for a deed of merit which gave proof of my ability to lead and command.) But, whether or no, I have to say that my captors were most kind to me and careful of my comforts. Immediately I came round, I was served with a cup of hot coffee and, later, some tinned food, then sent in an ambulance train to Estergom. My captors, I must tell you, were really Hungarians, brave fighters, and chivalrous foes to a fallen adversary.

Arrived at Estergom, into hospital I was placed and operated on without delay. But the operation did not turn out successfully, which worried me greatly, because when things went wrong like this, the surgeons did not usually waste time, but resorted to amputation right away. Doctors had not the experience at the beginning of the war that they gained as it went on. Consequently, their knowledge of what was possible in the way of ameliorative treatment was not so great.

Following shortly on the first operation, I underwent another, and then still another. Yet my legs did not mend properly, and I was told that if soon they did not, off they would have to come. Then, just as I had resigned myself to the worst, I was transferred to another hospital near by. Here I was not quite so well treated, but that, although you may think it rather strange, I welcomed. For, my injuries not regarded so severely, I was placed convalescent, which, of course, removed the fear of losing my limbs, for the time being, anyway. For I felt sure that, left to myself, to the good work accomplished by the Hungarian surgeons at the first hospital I could personally do a little to assist my recovery. Certain principles of passive exercise with which I was familiar I determined to employ. Results, I felt positively sure, could not fail to be beneficial.

So it proved! Unknown to anyone, I put into execution the ideas I had in mind, persevering daily until, at last, I was about on crutches, all fear of the loss of my legs removed. And naturally strong of constitution, my recovery proceeded rapidly, the day coming ultimately when I was able to discard my crutches, a result at which I rejoiced exceedingly. Now really convalescent, I was placed to work of a light nature, waiting on the other prisoners who were incapacitated, and so forth.

As I got stronger, so I was given other work to do, naturally very much harder. The principal part of this was the making of roads and the building of temporary hospitals, for the wounded of both sides continued to arrive in enormous numbers. From what

we could gather, the tide of battle ebbed first one way, then the other, neither side being able to claim a decisive advantage.

Here, at this hospital-prison-camp, for such it was, I remained a year. It was well guarded, of course, for several attempts at escape had been made, all ending disastrously, though, for those who so boldly ventured. Still, that did not dissuade some hardy spirits from resolving to try their luck should a suitable opportunity even occur. And among these I was numbered, I must tell you.

As time went on, the work that we were put to do became harder and harder, and the food became worse and worse. Most of it was tinned and much of it weevilly, with the result that our strength and physique deteriorated in consequence. Punishment also occurred more often than before, the tempers of our guards seeming to be affected by the stories that came through of the continual reverses which the Russian armies were inflicting on the Central Powers. Rumour had it that soon our men could be expected to cross the Carpathian Hills, which caused us all to feel very joyful, as this camp lay not a long way behind them.

While incarcerated here, I became very friendly with a fellowprisoner of the name of Ashaeff, a chap much after my own heart, who also like myself, only waited for a suitable opportunity to present itself to make an attempt to escape. But as no such opportunity arose, or seemed likely to arise, we decided to do our best to make it. Secretly, we planned a dash for liberty.

Three weeks altogether we were preparing and we laid our plans well. First, we realised that we should need money, and certain customs of the prisoners gave us an idea as to how we could get it. About seven o'clock each night, the camp shut down, and all the prisoners had to be in bed. Of course, they did not stay in bed, but used to get up and gamble, carrying this pastime out under great difficulties, as they had no lights. The money with which they gambled was that they earned at the various occupations to which they were put. Myself, I should tell you, I had been taught wood-carving and very well indeed had I got on with the business.

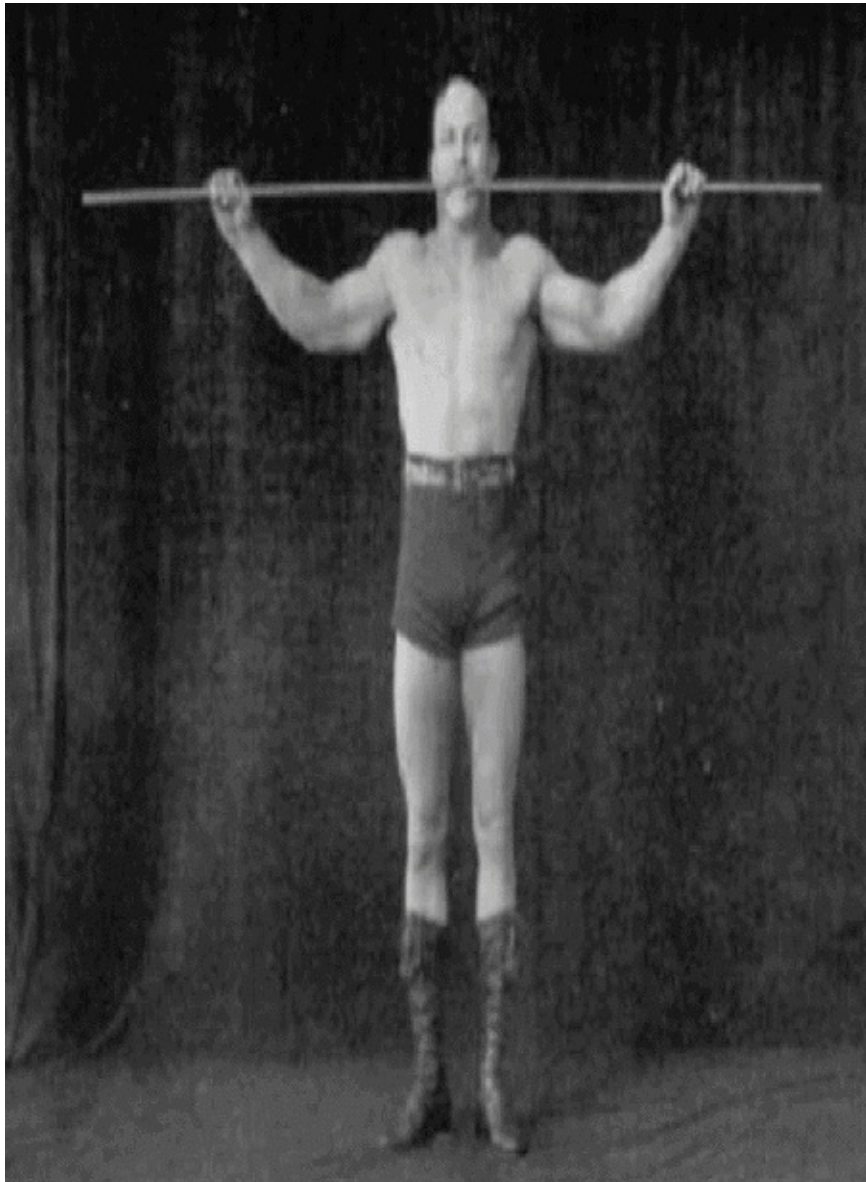
Now the guard whose duty it was to look after the lighting of the camp was very friendly disposed towards me. He himself was quite a strong fellow, a good wrestler also, and because of this we had some interests in common. Moreover, he was what you would call a business man. He had as much use for money as the next man, and any chance that came his way which looked as if it would put a little more into his pocket, that chance he took without the slightest hesitation. And I knew this. It was one of the things that I was relying quite a lot upon.

So the first opportunity I got, I took him aside, and asked him to smuggle me a little oil each day. Naturally, at once he wanted to know what I required it for, so I had to tell him. And what I told him pleased him exceedingly. The light which the prisoners needed to gamble properly I proposed to supply – at so much a time. I had made a little oil lamp out of an old can and some rope wick, and all I needed now to start operations was the oil. That is where he came in, and I agreed to split the proceeds

with him if he could and would supply me with an adequate quantity of the essential commodity. Ignoring the consequences if discovered, he agreed.

The first lot of oil came along in due course, and that night I did a grand trade, charging the different banks, as each combination of gamblers was called, five kopecks a time. The lamp, I must tell you, they were only allowed to use while one man held the bank. As soon as this was broken, another group was given the lamp for use, also at five kopecks a loan.

In this way I got together quite a fair sum of money, in spite of the halving agreement with the jailer. And with this money in our possession – Ashaeff and myself I mean now – we were able to get other things that we knew we should need if our escape proved successful. One of these things was a compass and another was a map. The first-named I managed to get at the camp stores, a kind of canteen, you would call it, I suppose. This was not very difficult, but it was only a little thing, a toy affair, which I said I wanted to hang on my watchchain.



THE IRON SCROLL FEAT.

(FIG. 1.)

Samson, after ascertaining the center of the bar, assumes the commencing position.

Note. – the iron bar used for the demonstration

of this feat was 6 feet in length, 1 inch wide and $\frac{1}{4}$ inch thick To procure a map was a far more difficult matter. But, at last, I managed to lay my hands on something that promised to answer our purpose. This was a map of railways, and although, naturally, it did not show the road, we decided it would have to suffice. After all, prisoners cannot be choosers, any more than beggars can be. And we also required a store of food. Here again our little hoard of money came in very useful, for we each developed a keen taste for lard, with which the prisoners were fairly liberally supplied three times a week. Rations of this commodity, therefore, wherever possible, we bought up, these being placed in tins and buried.

This was all right so far as it went, but we still had to get away. Guards patrolled the confines of the compound, which was thickly fenced with barbed wire. And to this wire were attached hundreds and hundreds of tins and bells, which had proved the undoing of many a poor devil who before had attempted to escape. Trying to get through the barbed wire at night, he had disturbed the sounding appliances, with the result that, in a very short time, he was absolutely riddled with lead.

We racked our brains for a way out, and at last we found one. Each day – or each evening, it would really be more accurate to say – we were allowed a little recreation, and this usually took the form of a pastime very similar to the game you play here in England of bowls. But the difference with this game was that instead of rolling the balls on nice level ground, we had to pitch them into holes scooped out for the purpose. And we scooped these holes out in turns, first one set of players, then the other. Consequently, when engaged in the game, we were never too closely scrutinized, and if a man was seen to be digging at the ground, no notice was taken from him.

In this laxity on the part of our guards lay our only chance. For, realising that to get through the wire without being discovered was a matter of sheer impossibility, we had decided to adopt a different plan altogether, this being to get underneath it. So, our minds made up on that point, Ashaeff and myself began to look around the compound to find out the best place to start on our burrowing operations. This agreed upon, we tested the ground the next time we played near there. And our tests disclosed that not only was the earth fairly soft, but it was almost free from large stones and roots of trees, this being all in our favour.

The very same night we made a start – or rather Ashaeff did, I remaining in camp to look after the business of collecting as much money as I could by loaning my improvised lamp to the gamblers. For about four hours Ashaeff worked, disposing of the earth excavated on top of a ridge in the compound, which was not only a very laborious task – harder even than the actual digging – but a dangerous one as well, as

there was always a risk of his figure being seen against the skyline, although he crouched low. After he had dug as far as he could this night, a sheet of iron he placed over the hole, covering this with a good thickness of earth, well stamped down to prevent discovery.

Next night he worked again, and the following night also, his absence not being noticed much by the other prisoners. Then operations had to be suspended for almost a week, as the moon was high all that time, making it impossible to go out and work on the ground without running risk of detection. How we longed for the darkness to come again! Five or six nights after, however, Ashaeff was able to resume his task once more, sky conditions changing, and remaining so for about a week.

It was while out on one of these nights that Ashaeff came near to discovery and being shot. But his luck held good, and the patrol passed on without their suspicions being aroused that a movement to escape was afoot. The patrol guard was almost on top of him, just as he was emerging from the hole, before he became aware of its imminence. But he kept quiet still, and very fortunately for him they passed on.

After Ashaeff had spoken of this occurrence, and also reported the extent of the progress he had made, the two items together made us decide that the very next night that seemed favourable for our purpose should see the attempt to escape carried out. But for a whole fortnight the conditions were most unfavourable. Then, suddenly, the weather changed, and everything in readiness, we decided to wait no longer, but risk it right away.

The night we had chosen was specially favourable. The sky was as black as ink, and a storm was due almost any minute, the wind being most boisterous, but fortunately blowing away from the quarters of the guards. Soon we reached the spot and feverishly commenced to work. I now took first place and, as I dug, Ashaeff shovelled the earth to the back. After nearly three hours had passed we broke through, opening up about two feet the other side of the wire. Cautiously we wriggled out, and for a few moments lay quite still, fearful lest we should be seen or heard. But, no, there was no need for alarm or further delay. Not a sign or sound of any other human being greeted our eyes or ears.

Assured on this point, the little sacks in which were our provisions we snatched up, and took to our heels. And for a long time we ran in the direction we had agreed to take, should we be fortunate enough to break through. Then Ashaeff's stamina began to give out and he entreated a halt. But to this I would not agree, and taking his arm, I both pulled and helped him along. We had to make the woods before daybreak, which was not a great time off. To halt before, I knew would be suicidal. Only in the shelter of these could we hope to hide and rest with any degree of security.

At last we reached the woods, and into them we plunged, just as the dawn was breaking. After we had penetrated them to a great depth, we dropped down, wearied and utterly exhausted. Food we partook of, but although we searched high and low, no water could we find to slake our thirst. Beyond the woods, we knew, were streams. But

to approach these in the light of the day, we realised would be worse than folly. So, although tortured by this absence of water, we had to stay where we were until nightfall, when, refreshed considerably by the day's rest, we set out to put more miles between ourselves and the scene of our late incarceration.

Without any incident worth noting, we continued on our journey, our object, I must tell you, being to make, if possible, the Carpathian Hills and there establish contact with the outposts of the Russian army. How we were going to do this, quite we did not know. That we hoped to do so is all that I can tell you.



THE IRON SCROLL FEAT.

(FIG. 2.)

Gripping the bar with his teeth, by bearing down with his hands, Samson bends the bar to the angle shown.

Some time before dawn we reached a dense forest, and here we decided to stay for the day, snugly hidden as on the previous one. Farther on we could have travelled before darkness went, but this we thought would not be wise, as by our map we made out the next lot of wooded country much too far away to reach in the short time left before sunrise. So after drinking deeply from a neighbouring trickle of water, into the forest we struck. But not far in did we go before we heard the baying of hounds. This alarmed us, for we could not be sure, at first, from which direction the sound came. Was the pursuit hot on our track? Were we soon to be retaken? What, now, was the best thing to do?

The baying of the hounds momentarily becoming louder, the need for speedy action became imperative. Ashaeff was for crawling deep into the undergrowth, hoping to evade detection that way. But this idea did not appeal to me. Futile, I thought it was, for even if the dogs were not bloodhounds, they would easily discover us that way. No, the thing to do, it seemed to me, was to climb. So climb we did. And so thick were the trees together, that from one to the other we were able to pass. But our alarm was soon allowed to die down, for the dogs – three, there appeared to be, from the sound – passed by some distance away to our left. Probably they belonged to some private owner. Certainly they were not military dogs.

When daylight came, from our perches we descended and looked around for a suitable place to hide and sleep. This very easily we found, our rest continuing till the late afternoon. After feeding, we searched again for water, but only stagnant pools abounded, so once more we had to put up with parching throats until night came, allowing us fuller liberty. And working by our compass – a most unreliable instrument, later, we found out this was – we set out on the next stage of our journey, again without experiencing any incident worthy of relation, hiding and sleeping the following day, not being disturbed in any way.

So likewise passed the fourth night and day. But on the fifth night, we encountered a serious setback. Just before dawn, we reached a wide river, which we knew could only be crossed on foot by a bridge that was bound to be guarded by sentries. And upon investigating cautiously, this we found to be true. At each end two sentries were stationed, which made a crossing by that way impossible.

The only thing to do was to try and find a place where the river could be forded, and this meant a long detour. But with no other alternative, we were forced to do this; and when we did finally decide to cross, we found that we had miscalculated both the depth of the water and the strength of the current – which meant that we had to swim across. This, in itself gave us no great trouble, although we were hampered somewhat by our clothes and heavy boots. But it resulted in our very valuable little store of food being completely spoiled, which was a great disaster. Cold and wet, hungry and tired, truly a sorry plight we were in.

Desperate men that we now were, to desperate measures we resorted in order to obtain food. After deliberating a long time, we decided to try and beg provisions from a

peasant. Of course, the risk of detection was great, heavy odds being that it would occur. And so it proved! The first place we approached was inhabited only by a very old woman, who, after listening to our tale of woe, and viewing with obviously suspicious eyes our unkempt and bedraggled appearance, finally consented to give us a loaf. And she was as good as her word, for which we praised her. But she soon confirmed our worst fears by stating that she believed us to be escaped prisoners, and would make it her business to inform the military of our presence in the neighbourhood at the very first opportunity.

From her attitude we could plainly see that our liberty was from here on going to be of short duration. But we did not give up hope because of that, and made off to the woods again. Once more we passed the day undisturbed, but at night, on resuming our journey, we were sighted by a patrol evidently on the lookout for us, and although we made a run for it, and put up a spirited fight when cornered, we were beaten by superior numbers and clubbed into insensibility, returning to consciousness to find ourselves slung across a horse's back, *en route* for the nearest military post. Truly a dismal position to be in, I think you will agree.

CHAPTER II

AFTER a very uncomfortable journey of a couple of miles or so, we reached a military barracks, where we were driven in by our captors and our bonds cut with scant ceremony. This done, we were then taken before the commandant to be interrogated, and to him we gave all the information that he required. To have attempted to conceal anything would have been useless. It would only have meant that we should have been stood up against the wall and shot right away – a fate that we expected would be ours eventually, in any case.

The information setting forth that we were cavalry officers, we were put to work to groom some horses and make smart their accoutrements. This accomplished to our guard's satisfaction, we were given a meal and told that the next morning we were to be taken back to the camp from where we had escaped. And to this information were added a few far from encouraging remarks as to what we might expect when we got there.

When the next morning arrived, we found we were not due to depart as stated, instead, being put to work in the stables again. Here we were kept busy all day, continuing so all through the next day, not setting out for the prison camp until the following morning. Whether we were reckoned desperate characters or not, I do not know, but the fact is that the escort detailed to take us back comprised six soldiers. Of course, we made no further attempt to escape, as no opportunity was given us. And in due course, after a train journey of a little under three hours, we returned to the spot where, just over a week ago, we had started from.

Once here, we were handed over to the governor, who had us marched off to the cells. Pretty certain in our minds that we should be shot within an hour or so, judge of our surprise when nothing further was done that day. In the morning, though, we were brought before the military court, getting off very lightly with the sentence of thirty days' solitary confinement each on a bread and water diet.

But the most remarkable thing about this, my first escape, I have yet to tell you, and I expect you will find it very difficult to believe. Nevertheless, it is perfectly true. We found out afterwards that until we were brought back in custody to the prison, my presence from the compound had never been missed, one prisoner only having been thought to escape. I may tell you that, at this prison camp, just over 30,000 men were in captivity. So that my absence not being noted was perhaps not quite so surprising after all.

The period of our solitary confinement finished, we were released for duty again, but transferred to another part of the camp, a section from which it was absolutely impossible to break away. And here we remained for some months. Then, the continual calling up of the various classes left Austria with a shortage of men, and we were parcelled out to work on the land and assist those left in the country in various

ways and conditions.

Myself, I was drafted to a place called Toraksentiniklosh, where there was a big estate devoted entirely to the care and training of horses. All the prisoners sent to work here were Russian cavalymen, principally Cossacks, and we soon found that, hard though the work was at first, it was a very welcome change from the life at the prison compound. On top of that, the food was much better, and, altogether, we did not have at all a bad time.

As the months passed, incredible as it may seem, the guards were gradually withdrawn from this place, bit by bit, until only one solitary jailer remained. But none of the men, with the exception of myself, entertained the least idea of escaping. Conditions, compared with what they had been through before, were far too comfortable for that.

Myself, though, I now considered that it was about time that I was off again. For a few weeks past, I had been laying my plans, simply delaying my escape because I hoped to persuade a Cossack officer, by the name of Iamesh, to make the attempt with me. At first, he was not at all eager, solely because of the reason I have explained. But after a while, I got him to consent, for news had just filtered through that the Russian army was once again about to cross the Carpathians.

Accordingly, this time much better prepared, one night we took our departure, simply walking out of the place after wishing our comrades farewell. We were well equipped for the venture this time – or, at least, I was – having procured a reliable compass and an equally reliable map. Also, a fair sum of money we each had. Food, I must tell you, we did not worry about at all, for plenty of this we knew we could get from the Russian prisoners who were working all over the land.

For two and a half months we enjoyed our liberty. Several times we sighted military parties on the road, but they were not looking for us, and by lying low we were able to escape detection. Then, one Sunday, we arrived at the outskirts of a town called Nadvarad, walking along quite openly, expecting to pass as prisoners out on recreational parole. But what we did not know was that, on a Sunday, prisoners were never allowed to walk out in or near this town, as it was close to the frontier. So, as we were sitting down by the wayside, resting and sunning ourselves, along came a patrol and simply gathered us up. They knew, by the simple fact that we were out this day, that it was not with military permission.

This time we were not sent back to the estate where we had escaped from, nor again were we punished at all seriously. Of course, we did not escape entirely, and what we had to undergo I will tell you. Handcuffed, with our hands raised above our heads, these were tied to a post with our heels off the ground. So that if we wanted to rest the weight of our bodies on our feet, we could only do this by having the cords cut into our wrists, which caused us great pain, as you can easily imagine. This little “stunt” we had to undergo four hours each day for a week.

When they found out here, at Nadvarad, that this was my second escape, they placed

me in an underground cell in the prison, in this cell being another fellow who turned out to be an artist in civil life. This cell, I must tell you, was very dark, and we had been confined in it for about a month, only being allowed to walk up and down the corridors, under the surveillance of armed guards, for a brief period of exercise each day, when, one morning, a Slavonic officer, round on a visit of inspection, opened the sliding panel at the top of the door and asked us whether we had any complaints to make. In reply, we said "No," but we would very much like the panel to be left open, so that we could have a little more light and air. Recognising us, by our accent, to be of similar blood, I suppose he felt more tolerantly inclined towards us than he would otherwise have been, and our request was granted.

A week after, for some reason or another, this officer looked in again at us and inquired similarly. This time we each had a favour to ask. The artist asked to be allowed to have some sketching materials, and I some wood and a knife for carving purposes. As you will remember, perhaps, I had learned wood-carving during the first part of my captivity; and the days and nights hanging so heavily on my hands, I felt I should like to amuse myself this way.

Being exemplary prisoners, our requests were granted. And the first thing the artist did was to make a rough sketch of the officer's face as it had shown itself briefly to him in the panel. Next day, when out in the corridor for exercise, he showed this sketch to one of the guards, who straightway took it from him, saying that he would be severely punished for daring to do a thing like this without permission. And in disgrace, we were both bundled back into the cell.

Shortly after, the officer came down and ordered the door to be thrown open, afterwards commanding us to step outside. He then inquired which of us was responsible for the drawing, and upon being acquainted, greatly surprised us all by instructing the fellow occupant of my cell to make a proper drawing of him right away, fresh materials being given him for that purpose. And so pleased was the officer with the result that he caused us both to be liberated from confinement and placed on very light work. The reason why he included me in this lightening of sentence was because the artist told him that it was at my suggestion he had made the sketch in the first place.

From light work in the prison we were eventually detailed for duties outside, which again prompted me to make another attempt to escape. Now much wiser than before, I decided that, conditions being so lax so far as prisoners were concerned, the best way to set out on the venture was in a perfectly open manner. I intended to make for the town of Kalashvar, where, I had learned in prison, the famous Herr Schmidt was running a big circus. So to the station I made my way and, without arousing any suspicion on the part of the officials there, found out which train was journeying to that town. This ascertained, I concealed myself in one of the luggage-trucks.

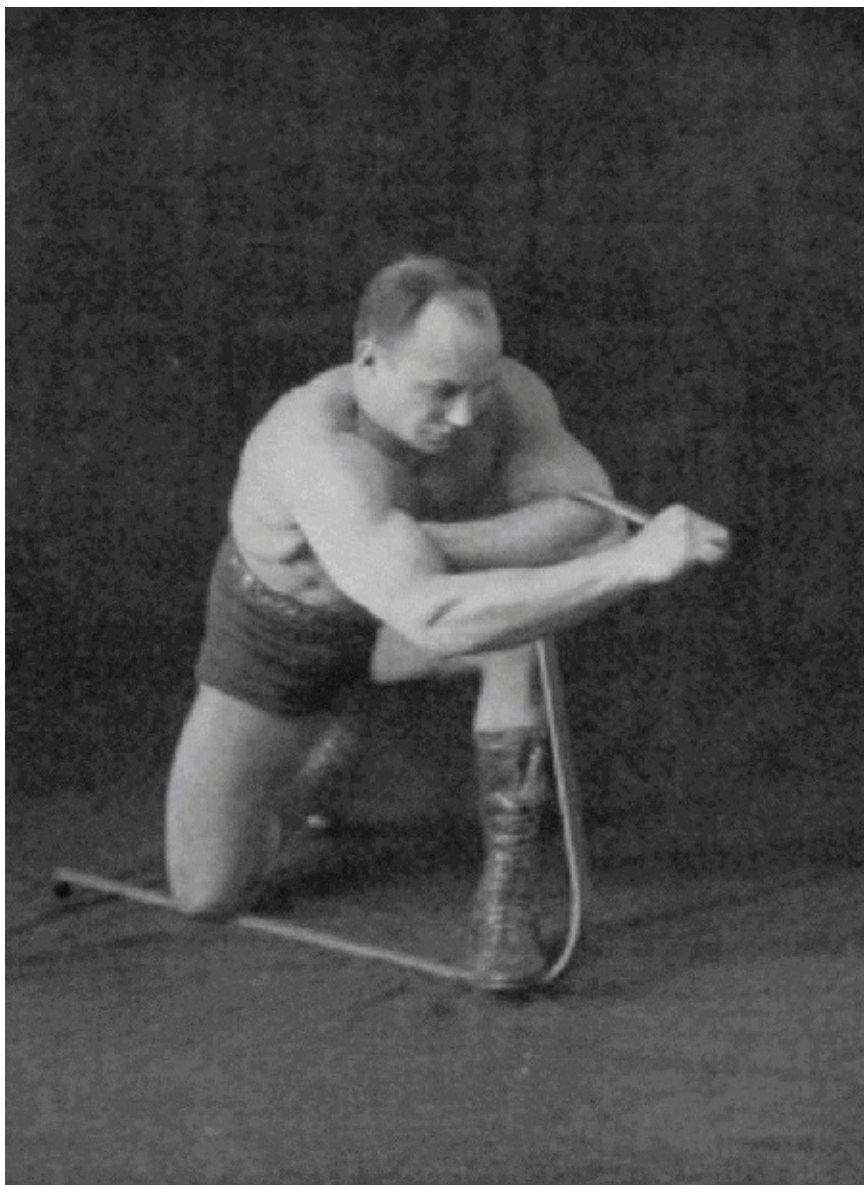
Without my presence on it being suspected, the train moved out late at night, the journey, so far as I was concerned, proving quite uneventful until we neared

Kalashvar. Then, when about half a mile from the station, I jumped from it into a clump of bushes without experiencing any serious injury, and made my way across the fields, passing the night in an old barn.

Early the next morning, I was out and made my way into the town. Schmidt's Circus I soon found, and the proprietor I applied to see. At first, my disreputable appearance, for my beard was ragged and my clothes unkempt, went badly against me. But I would not be denied; and, at last, tiring of my determined attitude, the door-keeper consented to take me to see Herr Schmidt.

Appearing before him, I straightway put my fate to the test and applied for work in his circus, telling him vividly all the many things I could do. He was very suspicious of me, I could see, but I managed to satisfy him at last, and he consented to give me a start. The thing which had caused him to relent in my favour, you must know, was the fact that I had told him I could put on a sensational strong act. He had nothing of this kind figuring on his programme, not even any wrestlers, and the prospect of a good attraction – the novel show that I had explained I could give – swayed him to decide to give me work.

I opened the next day with a show of sorts, for it was not possible for me to do all of which I was capable. Still, what I did do convinced the proprietor that in me he really had a find, and right away he commenced to advertise the fact. Only two days after my arrival at the Schmidt Circus, outside it and all round the town were posters announcing the appearance there of “The World's Strongest Man.” This, I must tell you, was the first time that I had ever been described as such.



THE IRON SCROLL FEAT.

(FIG. 3.)

Having assumed a position which admits of leverage – and contraleverage – being most effectively applied, Samson proceeds to loop the ends of the bar. So pleased, indeed, was Herr Schmidt with my performance and

the business it brought, that he fitted me out with new clothes and, generously, made me a liberal advance of money. But my good fortune was not to last long, as, truth to tell, I did not expect that it would. I did not, though, quite anticipate that it would come to an end in the way it did. Still, it is always the unexpected that happens, as you know full well, the unexpected, in this case, occurring in the following way.

CHAPTER III

THE announcement that in the town was appearing “The World's Strongest Man” aroused the curiosity of the military commandant of that area, and down he came one morning – it was the eighth day of my working, if I remember rightly – wanting to know why such a splendid athlete, obviously fit, was not serving in the Austrian army. Proprietor Schmidt not being able to furnish a satisfactory explanation – he himself, I must tell you, was exempt from service – I was sent for and had to appear before the commandant. Of course, I could give none either, and it was not very long before it was discovered that I was an escaped prisoner. So back into captivity I went once again, threatened with all kinds of dire consequences.

But these did not come to pass. Speaking truthfully, I must say that the Austrians and Hungarians were most kind to prisoners in general. That much I can vouch for, not only from my own personal experiences, but from knowledge of the experience of others. In no other country – no, not even in England, I am sure – would prisoners have been allowed so much latitude as were the Russian captives in Austria. Nor would escaped prisoners, after being recaptured, have been treated so tolerantly as I was, and others as well.

This time, though, having found out that my previous history included three escapes, they dealt with me more harshly than before, this being perfectly understandable, as you will agree. In fact, if my escapes had been carried out with violence, I should have been punished more severely still, the extent of the punishment depending upon the gravity of my crime. If I had badly injured any of the guards, then I should have been terribly flogged. And if it had so happened that a guard had been killed, then I should have been summarily shot upon recapture.

After I had been brought before the military tribunal, sentence of solitary confinement in a fortress was promulgated, this to last for the period of the war. Accordingly, away I was taken and imprisoned, my legs being shackled with gyves, and my wrists with cuffs and chain. The cell into which I was thrown was a cold, damp affair, below the ground, light and air coming in but little through a stoutly barred opening in the wall, well above my head, which looked out on to a moat. Beyond the moat a wall, at least 18 feet high, ran round the fortress, making escape, if not impossible, at least a very difficult proposition.

But although so unfortunately situated, I did not despair. A chance will come again some day, I told myself, and my spirits I kept up as well as I could. For I knew that to become depressed was the worst thing in the world. Should an opportunity present itself and find my spirits low, I might hesitate to take advantage of it.

Meanwhile, other things were happening as well as this inward fortifying of my spirit. So tightly shackled all day and night – my fetters were only unlocked twice a day by the guards for purposes of meals – my physique began to fall away as a result. This grieved me considerably, for I was proud of my strength and development. And, pondering deeply, I decided that the only way to stop my physical deterioration was to exercise the muscles in a different way from what I had always done when enjoying

full liberty of action. Arising out of my misfortune, really, sprang the idea of the system of exercises which now, in this country, is becoming so well known. In captivity first were employed those principles which produce such astonishing results.

I had plenty of time to carry out my ideas. In fact, I had nothing else to do. And one of the things I speedily discovered was that for many hours could this kind of physical stimulation be kept up. Instead of wasting energy, this, on the contrary, was retained. Which was fortunate for me, in more ways than one, when the position I was in is remembered. For I did not get too much to eat, I must tell you, and what I did get was not of the most nourishing nature. And so I continued for about three months, gradually recovering my lost development and adding appreciably to my depleted strength and energy.

About this time another thing happened which was to prove more important than at first it seemed. Apparent submission and resignation to my fate caused the conditions of my imprisonment to be somewhat modified. The fetters on my legs were struck off, and I was allowed out for an hour or so each day to take walking exercise round the fortress grounds under the eye of a watchful guard, my hands tightly manacled behind me.

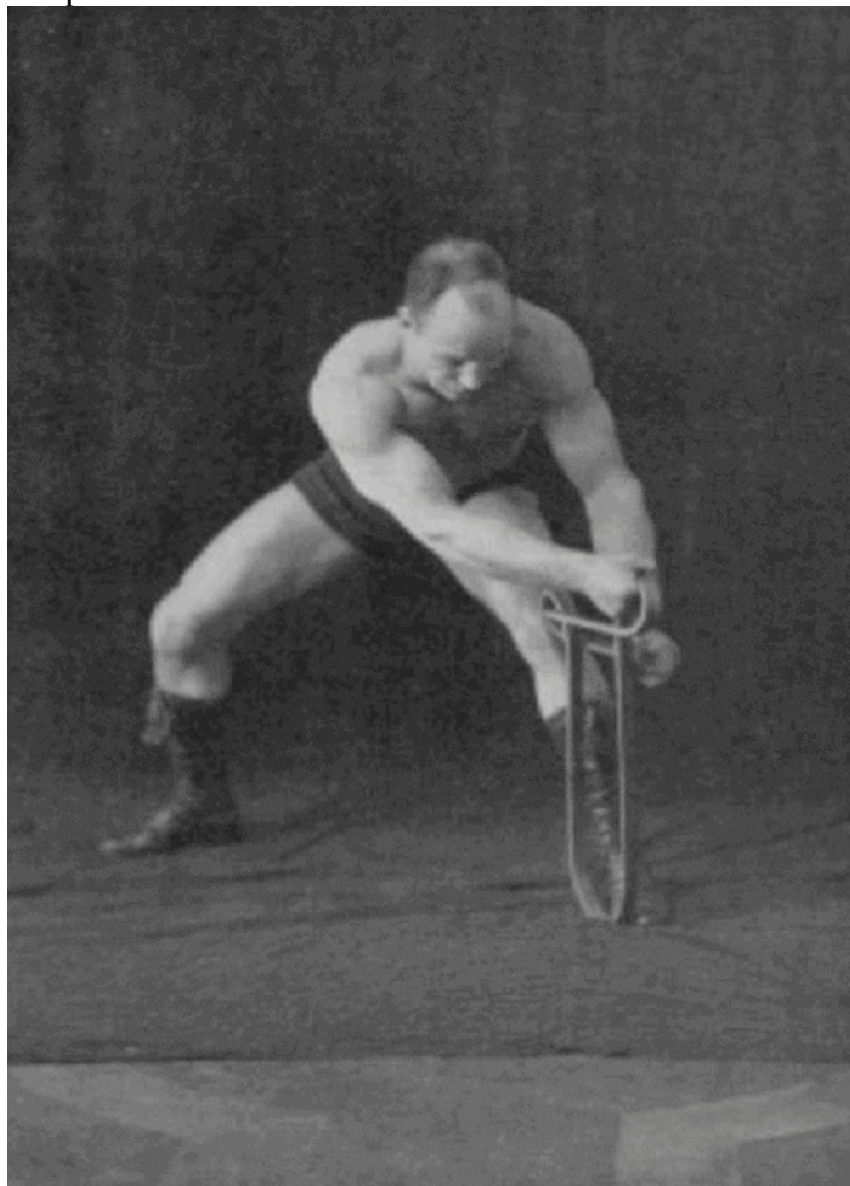
While so engaged one day, a fine hound came running up to the guard, whom it obviously knew quite well, turning afterwards to me, evidently wishing to make friends. Delighted at the opportunity, I spoke a few endearing words to the dog, whereat I found it was a most intelligent animal; one which, I conjectured, could quickly be taught to do a few easy tricks. So, having obtained the guard's permission, as well as I was able, I put the dog through a preliminary coaching, the animal responding in a way that really surprised me, accustomed to the speedy training of dogs though I was. The animal, my guard informed me, belonged to the fortress governor.

This association was a welcome break in the deadly routine of my life, and every opportunity I got when out at exercise I used to coach this dog, until, at last, he could do some very creditable tricks. Then, one day, while so occupied, the guard looking on, the governor, crossing the square on some errand, caught sight of this and walked quickly down to where we were standing. Instead of reprimanding the guard and having me punished, as some might have done, he evinced great interest and pleasure in what I had been able to accomplish with the animal. So much so, that he gave me permission to continue, after he had ascertained that I had previously, among other things, been a circus animal-trainer.

I pointed out to him that, manacled as I was, nothing else could I teach the dog to do further to what I had done, as to train animals properly, a man must have the full use of his hands. To unshackle me altogether, though, the governor was not agreeable. But he compromised by having my hands secured in front, the cuffs being connected up with a longer chain, which gave my hands practically their full freedom.

That day, after I had been returned to my cell, I sat down on the edge of my rough bed

and pondered. If I was still to be allowed the use



THE IRON SCROLL

FEAT.

(FIG. 4.)

The ends looped, Samson sets the bar in position for putting the first coil in the middle.

of my hands, then there were distinct possibilities of breaking out of my cell. The bars I could attack stealthily, if only I could find a suitable instrument, and my eyes open for such I would have to keep. Still, time enough for me to think more about this when, later, I should see what would happen.

The next day, when taken out again for exercise, I was told to follow the guard to the governor's quarters, which reached, I was instructed to put the dog through its paces, the animal's antics being noted with keen delight by the governor, who was very proud of the hound, also some other officers who were congregated there with him. And as a reward for my patience I was asked if I had any request to make which could, without interfering with my mode and term of imprisonment, be granted. The only thing I

could think of at the moment which would be to my advantage was to receive more and better food. Upon making this request, the governor promised that he would see what could be done in that direction. And he was as good as his word. From that time on, I received three meals a day, all of much better quality than before.

The training of the animal I still carried on when allowed out for exercise and, my actions being with the full consent of the fortress governor, watch on my movements was not kept so strict as before. I was now permitted to pass beyond bounds which previously had marked the limit of my perambulations, and this I took every advantage of, seeking all the time for a tool which I could utilise to aid me in my escape. At last one day I spied a piece of iron rod which I was sure would serve my purpose. Under cover of playing with the dog, I picked it up, quite unobserved, and concealed it in my clothes. Prior to this, I had secured a piece of stout wire which I thought I could use to open the locked cuffs on my wrists; and this, waiting on a suitable opportunity, I had hidden in the mattress of my bed.

That night in the cell I commenced to work to effect my escape. Three bars there were, blocking the window, and I calculated that if I could weaken the masonry round the top and base of one of the end bars and finally remove it, with its aid I could lever the others apart enough to squeeze through. The chain that linked up the handcuffs I knew would not hinder me in the work, and when the proper moment came I felt sure I could break it asunder by the simple process of twisting it round and round in my fingers, as many of you may have seen me do in my act on the stage. The cuffs on my wrists I hoped to unlock by the piece of wire. I had seen it done before, and knew it was not a very difficult matter.

To make an effective start necessitated that I should sharpen my iron rod until it was spike-pointed, and this I did by rubbing it on the stone floor of the cell in the corner where the marks so made would never be noticed. This took time, a week or more, but at last I considered it sharp enough to put it into use. After rubbing it up each night, I must tell you, I concealed it in the mattress in company with my little piece of wire. The mattress, so long as I had been imprisoned in the cell, was never changed or even inspected.

As soon as I began to pick at the stone into which was sunk the bar, I could see that my task was going to prove much easier than I had anticipated. As I told you before, the cell was damp, the most being responsible for this. And the fortress was old. Consequently, rust and age combined had caused erosion of both iron and masonry, rusting the former, and causing the latter to crumble when attacked with a sharp-pointed instrument.

About two weeks I worked each night, brushing the broken stone into the moat, and at last I had the end of the bar exposed. A steady pull on it convinced me that now I could rend it away from the top whenever I chose to make the attempt. This, though, I proposed to defer until I could smuggle in a sufficient quantity of rope as would reach from the top of the wall to the ground. I had managed to secure several pieces the last

few days, which, already knotted together, were secreted in the mattress. But, useful though they were, in length they were not enough.

For my idea, I must tell you, was this: when I was ready, I would break the chain that linked my hands together and open the locked wristlets with the piece of wire, after which I would wrench the bar from the window, then lever the other two apart. This done, I would then bend the iron spike into a sharp-pointed hook and attach it to the rope, after which, with it fastened round my body, I would drop through the window into the moat and swim across. The other side reached, I would then throw the hook on to the top of the wall, climb up the rope and descend on the other side. Once free, I had sufficient confidence in my own resources to remain hidden until such time as it would be safe for me to make the attempt to cross the frontier.

Next day, when out with the dog, I managed to secure another length of rope, which I got into the cell undetected. This still was not sufficient for my purpose, but I decided to wait no longer, as I had heard that day from the guard that all able-bodied prisoners in the fortress were to be sent to the German front in France to dig trenches, as a big advance of the Allies was expected. But I am not going to France, I told myself, to be blown to pieces by artillery. When they come to take me in the morning, I shall be missing. For it was in the morning that we were to be assembled and railed to our destination. At least, so had said the guard. You may think I was unwise to start on my venture before I was properly ready, knowing what it would mean should I again be recaptured. But there was another way, I knew, as you will see.

So, when night time came, I laid quite still until satisfied that the guards had departed for their quarters, which were some distance away, no watch being kept on any of the prisoners after dusk, as it was reckoned unnecessary, so securely locked in and barred up were they. Then up I stood and commenced work on the chain. About five minutes it took to break this. Then I started on the handcuffs. But to open these with the wire I found was a much more difficult matter than I had reckoned it would be, owing to the lack of light. I, therefore, had no alternative but to leave this, but it meant that I should have to break the two halves of the chain from the cuffs on my wrists, as, hanging, they would inconvenience me considerably. This did not take long, and I was now ready to turn my attention to the bar, which I soon had out of its sockets.

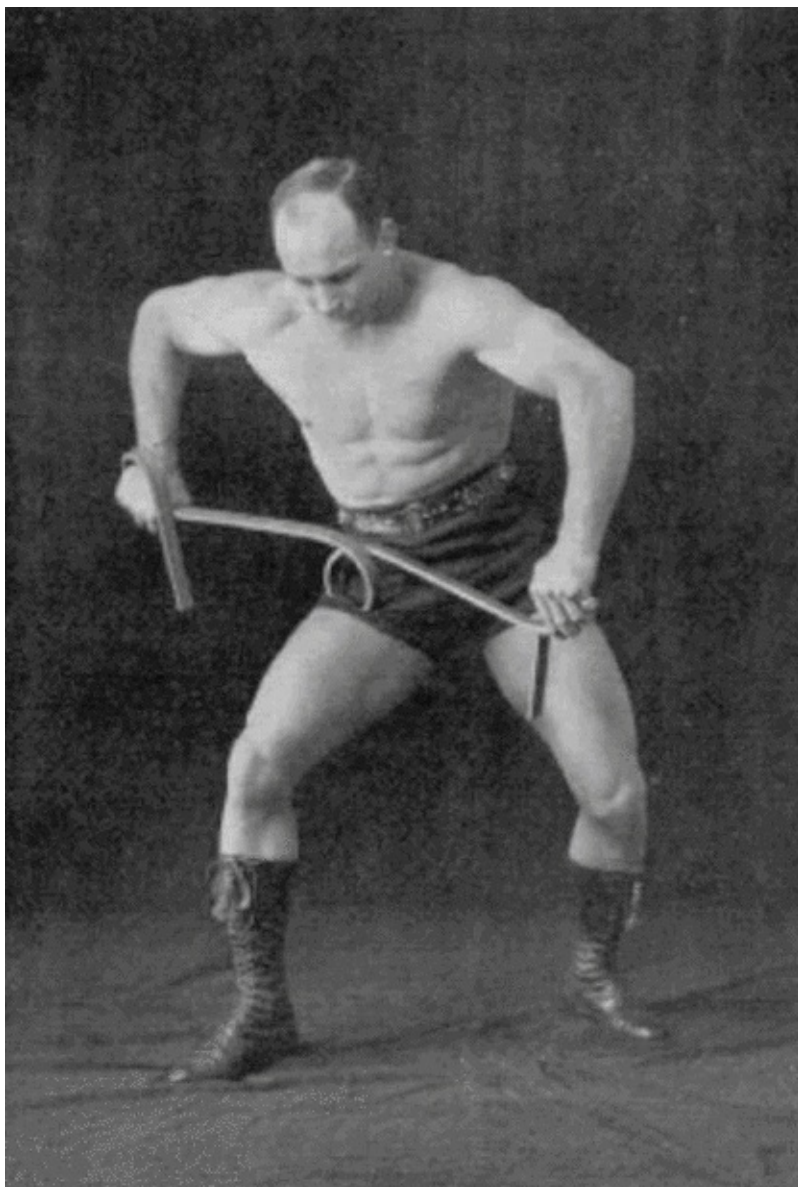
The bar removed, between the two remaining I inserted it and began to lever away. Before long I had them bent apart, but not far enough open could I get them in this manner to enable me to pass through. So, laying the bar aside, I strove to wrench them out of the masonry. This, although they were considerably weakened, I failed at first to do. But, persevering, eventually I got the middle bar free at the top, its removal then being a comparatively simple matter.

The way open, I now had the hook to fashion from the iron spike that had served me so worthily, a feverishly I proceeded to bend this into the shape required. After accomplishing this, to it I attached the made up length of rope and, not bothering about the wrist cuffs, coiled the rope round my body and crawled through the window,

lowering myself as silently as I could into the water. Across the moat I swam, gaining the other side in safety, and proceeded to crawl across the space intervening to the sheltered shadow of the wall. Detection I did not fear much, as the night was pretty black, and in any case, I suspected that too sharp an outlook would not be kept from the fortress towers, as escapes from this place were not expected. Still, it was desirable to proceed warily.

The wall reached, along beside it I made my way, still crawling, till I reached the spot where, only a few paces away from it, stood a tree. I was previously quite aware of the existence of this tree and of its close proximity to the wall. And, knowing these two things, I had seen in them a way out of the difficulty into which the shortness of the rope had placed me. This way, you will remember, I hinted at earlier on.

By climbing the tree and throwing my rope from there, I reckoned to be able to reach the top of the wall. So, without any delay, I shinned up the tree and, clambering out as far as I dare along one of the boughs running that way, proceeded to make casts for the wall. After several abortive attempts, I successfully grappled it with my hook and, taking a strain, concluded it was holding firmly enough to take the swing-off from the tree. But, either my testing was faulty or else the hook slipped as I momentarily released the strain when dropping from the bough, for as I crashed against the wall, the hook came away from the top and I fell heavily to the ground.



THE IRON SCROLL FEAT.

(FIG. 5.)

The first coil made, the manufacture of a second is then commenced. For a minute or two I lay there stunned, but, fortunately, with no bones broken. Then, recovered sufficiently, up the tree once more I climbed, again essaying the task. After several failures, I secured what seemed a firm hold and, taking a chance, swung off the tree a second time. The wall I met with a thud that shook every part of my body, and for the moment I nearly lost my grip. But the hook held and, hand over hand, up the rope I swarmed, finally reaching the top. Here I paused only to fix the hook more securely round the opposite way. Then, paying the rope out, down it on the other side of the wall I descended, dropping from its end on to my feet, once more a free man.

CHAPTER IV

AFTER making my escape from the fortress, I got rid of the steel cuffs round my wrists without much trouble, and struck out for Buda-Pesth, which following upon both lean and exciting times, I reached eventually. On my way I had to rely for food on what I could get from Russian prisoners working on the land, and when I couldn't get any that way, I just had to go without. Pursuit, I discovered later, was not so much to be feared as I had thought. For the attitude of Austria towards the Russian prisoners she held had changed considerably since the Bolshevik revolution. Always fairly tolerant, as I have told you before, now it was even more so. And, again, she had troubles of her own. The Allies' blockade was telling on her, just as it was on Germany, and she was hard put to feed her captives, the number of which ran into hundreds of thousands. So, where parole was given it was usually accepted, prisoners being found work to go to, and, of course, only too glad to do so. Military supervision, at the time of which I speak, was here, in Austria, very lax.

Because of all this, when I reached Buda-Pesth I was able to get a job on a quay, loading ships. So far as food and money were concerned it was a good situation, as long as you got on with your work and did it quickly and well, not too much authority being exercised. Here I stayed for quite a while, enjoying the work, really, for I regarded it as excellent training. Then, one day, the wander-lust seized me again, and off once more I went.

The real reason for absenting myself from this work was that in Buda-Pesth a big circus called the Biketoff had recently arrived, and with it I thought I could get work either as a strong man or a wrestler. But when I applied it was only to find that of performers they had more than they had business. Consequently, there was no vacancy for me to fill.

The chief of the circus, however, although not able to fix me up personally, gave me a letter of recommendation to one Zaia Ianosh, a very famous Austrian wrestler, who owned a circus himself, the topline troupe being a wrestling combination in which he and his five almost equally famous brothers were included. This seemed to look like what I was out to find. After a little search, I discovered the residence of Zaia Ianosh, and put the letter and my application before him.

Now of all the men I ever came across in the wrestling business, Zaia Ianosh was, I should say, the most remarkable. He combined with great stature and terrific strength a brain every bit as clever in proportion. And, later, he proved one of the very best friends I have ever had. To him, really, I owe a good deal, and I am not only prepared, but very glad indeed to admit it.

In addition to his other attributes, Zaia Ianosh was a very silent man. The letter delivered, he took it, broke the seal and read it, then beckoned me into his room and motioned to me to be seated. So placed, he looked me up and down. But for quite a long time not a single word did he say, until I began to think that he surely must be dumb. But he could speak all right, could Zaia Ianosh, when he considered was sufficient occasion. And presently he did speak, only then to ask me if I had eaten.

Upon hearing that I had not for some long time, he sent for viands, to which I did full justice, making an excellent meal.

My repast finished, Zaia Ianosh, who had smoked incessantly all the time I was busily engaged in eating, asked me about myself, and, as far as I thought I dare, I told him. Whereupon he relapsed again into silence. After a while, though, he spoke again. "All that I should know you have not told me," said he. "If we are to do business together, completely candid with me you must be. You have no need to fear me. But all about you I must know."

So, liking his look and his manner, I told him all. When I had finished, he clapped me on the shoulder. "You are a man after my own heart," said he. "I think we shall get along very well together. But I still have to see what you can do. My circus is now refitting, and will not be ready for the road until four days' time. Come, then, at that time, and see me again, and I will have you tested. If you are as good as you would have me believe, then into my troupe I will take you and pay you well."

Thus it was left. At the appointed time, I was back again, and away to the circus we went, accompanied by his brother Josif, a fellow almost as gigantic as my former host and now prospective employer. Arrived there, I was introduced to the other members of the troupe, eighteen in all, and put on for a trial with a chap weighing nearly 20 stone, a Roumanian, whose name I was to ascertain after, was Pashkofski. He I threw in three minutes, dislocating his shoulder and breaking his collarbone, for the bout, though brief, was extremely fierce.

The result greatly pleased Zaia Ianosh. "Well have you acquitted yourself, friend Zass," said he. "You may consider yourself one of us from now on." So did I enter the circus of Zaia Ianosh and gain his valuable and unwavering friendship.

With this circus I remained for about two and a half years, constantly working, and nearly always doing well, touring Hungary in the summer months, winter being spent each year in Czecho-Slovakia, Roumania, Serbia, and Austria. During all the time I was with this circus never once did I suffer the indignity of having my shoulders placed flat on the ground. Next to Zaia Ianosh – to whom I could not concede the great difference in the weight between us – I was the star wrestler of the troupe.

Before passing from this part of my life to the next, I will tell you how we used to work the wrestling part of the show. Every performance, the wrestlers would enter to the strains of music played by the circus band, which comprised some first-class musicians. Zaia Ianosh headed the file of wrestlers, and I brought up the rear. Then, after we had paraded once round the circus, challengers would be invited to come forward.

These on the scene, they would at once be told that before they could meet Zaia Ianosh, the champion, they would have to start at the end with the smallest man and work through. I was, of course, the chap they had to tackle, and as no one ever defeated me, they never got a chance to wrestle anybody else. Which was what was

intended. Some of the wrestlers were no good for hard competition work, being long past their prime, the real purpose of their inclusion in the troupe being to wrestle exhibitions only. When no challengers came up, as sometimes was the case, then they wrestled with me or else among themselves. The performance usually finished, though, by Zaia Ianosh and myself wrestling a spirited bout together.

After appearing with Zaia Ianosh's Circus for the time stated, a mood to make a change in my number overtook me. I had become tired of wrestling and I wanted a diversion. At first I decided to put on another strong act, similar to that which I had been working up at the period when war broke out. But after some thought, I dropped the idea, choosing in its place an act with performing dogs. I had already one dog that I had trained to do a number of clever tricks – among them a forward somersault, a feat which had taken me months to get the animal to accomplish – and with this act I reckoned to be able to secure that work which I needed as a recreational change.

There was an outfit, I knew, which specialised in attractions of this kind, and to the management of it I applied for an engagement. After giving a trial show, I was taken on, my act, as I had only one dog at this time, including several rather difficult balancing feats by myself and a young lady whom I had met in Serbia. The name of this lady was Miss Kitty, and in addition to being a clever balancer she was also an accomplished equestrienne. Together we gave what was considered a most attractive show.

As time went on, though, finding the dog's performance was so much appreciated wherever we went, I got hold of other dogs and trained them also, until, eventually, I had four working in the show. With the Talota – for that was the name of this circus – I stayed a season, then came to Buda-Pesth with my act, appearing at the Kasino and Orfium, my turn being most enthusiastically received. While working here, though, misfortune overtook me. Rushing from one hall to the other, I contracted a chill, and complications following, I found myself in hospital, hovering between life and death. When I came out, I was only a shadow of my former self. The dogs and the girl, I must tell you, had gone to Serbia to fulfil a contract previously made, Miss Kitty having shown such a liking and aptitude for the work that she had proved capable of acting with the animals in my place.

As soon as I was able, I followed my number to Serbia, and in that country I recuperated. Before the summer was over, I had, by careful living and the steady practice of my physical culture methods, practically regained in full my former strength and the development of which I was always so proud. And as I once more entered the kingdom of physical power, the old desire to appear before the public as a strong man again began to possess me. But for an opportunity to gratify my wish, it seemed I should have to wait for some time, as where I was now working no opening for the show I had in mind appeared at all likely to present itself.

Then, while I was deliberating as to whether I should forego the idea and continue in my act with the dogs, Schmidt, whom you will remember was the man who gave me

work as a strong turn while I was a prisoner of war, wrote asking me to return to Buda-Pesth, saying he had a most important proposition to put before me – one which would mean much money in my pocket if only I cared to take it on. It was, he said to me, the opportunity of a lifetime, and knowing him to be a man whose word could be relied upon, I decided to act on his suggestion and return at once to Buda-Pesth.

What happened as a result of the action I took brings me to the last part of my story.

PART IV

CHAPTER I

B ACK again in Buda-Pesth, I lost no time in calling on Herr Schmidt and finding out what he wanted. And what I learned interested me exceedingly. Briefly, what he had to say was this:

At a neighbouring circus, the name of which I have forgotten at the moment, a new strong man was billed to appear. Breitbart was his name, and the feats he was reputed to be able to do, to the minds of some people, bordered on the miraculous. Chains, it was said, he could break round his chest and arms. Nails he could knock through thick planks of wood with his bare hands, and other things just as astounding. More, he could lie on bed of sharp-pointed nails without suffering injury to his flesh while a heavy stone was placed on his chest and attacked with blacksmith's hammers. Also – and this was the feat which captured the imagination of the public most, perhaps – the pull of two horses he could resist successfully while they were being driven in opposite directions.

Now Schmidt had very great faith in my powers – more really than, at this particular time, I had myself – and his idea was that he should bill me at his circus as a counter attraction. He remembered full well how I had surprised the people when he gave me work before; and, naturally, he looked to me to help him out of the difficulty. For it was one that he was in, make no mistake about that. A show such as the rival circus claimed that Breitbart could put on would be bound to damage his business exceedingly. And he knew this as well as anybody. Hence his anxiety to fix up a counter attraction, and his choice of me as that attraction.

As Schmidt debated, I was thinking deeply. Quite apart from the dept of gratitude which I owed him, the prospect of appearing once again at his circus appealed to me greatly, for not only was he a most generous employer, but I should be travelling the exact direction which my inclination prompted me to follow. But there was a very important thing to be considered. I had only just recovered from a most severe illness, you must remember, and I was far from sure that I was in as good physical condition as work of this description would necessitate. In fact, I felt pretty certain that, while I had made a marvellous recovery, the strain that such an act would place on my constitution would soon disclose that I was not the man I once was. The slightest relapse on my part, and not only would I be finished as a star attraction, but Schmidt himself would suffer as a result. Yes, there was a most distinct need for me to proceed

cautiously.

When Schmidt had finished talking, I told him what was in my mind, and he agreed with me that to take risks of any description would be most unwise in every way. But his idea he was not prepared to drop in the least. “Why not stay here with me,” said he, “and train hard to fit yourself for the position? For it, I am sure, you can most worthily fill. If you need money to carry on, I shall be glad to let you have it, as I know it will be a good investment.”

Schmidt's faith in my powers gratified me exceedingly, and his generosity touched me to the heart. But I had neither the wish nor the need to avail myself of his offer to loan me money, as I had funds quite sufficient to carry on for a long time, my act with the dogs having been a fairly lucrative one. And thanking him profusely, this much I told him. “Well, then,” said he, “will you stop here, accepting my hospitality, while you train?” “Yes,” I replied, “I will do this. When shall a start be made?” “As soon as you like to get to work,” answered Schmidt. “Good,” I rejoined. “A beginning I will make in earnest tomorrow morning.”

During the day I laid my plans. If I am going to do any good at all with this new business, I thought to myself, then I ought to be ready in a month. So, accepting this time as the limit of my preparation, I proceeded to map out how I should work during that time. Roughly, the lines I intended to follow were these:

First, the chain breaking round the arms and chest – which I suspected were nothing more or less than tricks! Mine would not be, though, for quite apart from the fact that I should never be agreeable to



THE IRON SCROLL FEAT.

(FIG. 6.)

The second coil finished, the ends of the bar are forced inwards and post one another in order to make a third. put any feat through this way, Schmidt, I knew, would not consent to anything of this kind, even had I felt that way inclined. He was always adamant on that point, and rightly so. "If it is a strong act," he used to say to performers in that line applying for work, so I have heard more than once, "then a strong act it has got to be. Trickery and conjuring devices must be cut out." Consequently, his principles being well known, the reputation of the Schmidt circus ran high.

Well, as I commenced to say, the chain breaking feats! There was, of course, only one way to do these genuinely, and that was to perform them as pure expansion feats. That meant that the parts affected would have to be brought up to the right pitch of power

and toughness, practice being conducted during the period of preliminary preparation with chains of a very light calibre. To tackle chains of a thickness which could not easily be broken, in the hope that by continual exertion they would snap, would be of little use. The secret of all improvement in feats like this is gradual progress from one stage to another, the severity of the test only being increased by degrees that are hardly noticeable. This, any good teacher will tell you.

Then the nails that I should be expected to knock through planks of wood! Well, that item would have to be dealt with similarly. First, a thin plank, my hand protected with a leather glove, then a thicker plank, and then a thicker one still. The horses, too, would have to be worked up to in the same way. Men pulling each side, I proposed to start with, until, eventually, I could take the strain of a sufficient number as would total up in power to the strength of a full grown truck horse. Lying on the nails I knew would not bother me at all. The feat was not new. I had done it several times before. But to allow stone to be hammered on my chest at the same time I had not attempted. This I should have to get accustomed to right away, light at first, heavier each successive time of trial.

For the tug-of-war feat – as I have heard it described in England many times – I had plenty of willing helpers, as the other employees of the circus were only too pleased to assist me, acting under Schmidt's instructions. A more enthusiastic lot of fellows than those who were working here, in different ways, it would have been difficult to find. And so with any other feat, to perform which I should have to call on individuals to come in as part of it. No difficulty did I have at all in this direction.

Daily I progressed, and the end of the month found that I had calculated the time necessary for preparation to a nicety. Each day, of course, Schmidt would be an interested spectator of all I attempted, and what he saw made him a very glad man. "You are the chap, right enough," said he, as he witnessed my steady progress. "True it is that 'The World's Strongest Man' will shortly be showing in Buda-Pesth. But he will not be anywhere else except in the famous Schmidt circus." Very proud of his outfit, was Herr Schmidt, I can tell you. And, of course, he had every reason to be.

The month up, a round-table conference was held between Schmidt, his wife, and myself. "We have got the feature," said he, "but I am uncertain as to how I shall name you. As Alexander Zass you must not be billed, as people who know you by that name will never believe that you are really performing such remarkable feats. No, it must be as a new strong man altogether that you must appear. This is essential if we are to make a success of your act right from the very commencement."

For a long time we pondered on a suitable name – one that would speak for itself. First Schmidt would suggest one to which I raised objections, then I would put one forward to which he did the same. Then Mrs. Schmidt asked if she might suggest one. "Why not call him 'Samson?' " said she. "Samson was the greatest of all strong men, and Alexander is certainly the greatest of all that we have ever known." "Splendid," said Schmidt. "What say you, Alexander?" "It is all the same to me," I replied. So

“Samson” it was decided my name should be.

Everything now plain sailing, Schmidt put his bills out all over the town, announcing that “Samson – The World's Strongest Man” was shortly to appear at his circus, claiming, on my behalf, that although a much smaller man than Breitbart had been ascertained to be, much greater feats of strength would I do. The date on which I was to open, I must tell you, coincided with that fixed for Breitbart's appearance. And, with excitement growing greater day by day, final touches to my act I put.

At last the all-important date arrived and, as billed, I opened. But the rival attraction which proprietor Schmidt had so feared never made its appearance in Buda-Pesth. For some reason or another, Breitbart failed to show up; consequently, we had matters all our own way, reaping a much richer harvest than we should have done had we had to contend against opposition. It was said at the time that Breitbart, hearing I was there – for he knew of me as well as I knew of him – had deemed discretion to be the better part of valour and acted accordingly. But this I do not think was the explanation of his non-appearance. I have every reason to believe that his failure to turn up was due to inability to secure the necessary passport.

Be that as it may, here I was in Buda-Pesth, appearing several times a day, drawing both big houses and the highest salary it had up till then been my luck to handle. And Schmidt was as delighted as it was possible for a man to be. Never before, he said, had he touched such high receipts over such a lengthy period. And of me he could not make enough, my salary raising three times, entirely unmasked, during the time I was here with him.

We got on so well together that it is difficult to say how long I should have stayed there had it simply remained a matter of simple choice. This, though, it did not so prove. One day an interesting visitor arrived from France, a certain M. Debre by name, and his coming altered the whole aspect of things as they were then running. He was, he said to Schmidt, representing the Novi Circus of Paris, his business in Buda-Pesth being to discover, and engage, if possible, any turns likely to prove an attraction in the Gay City. And mine was one such turn, he said, certain to be well received by his patrons. Would it be possible for proprietor Schmidt to release me? And, if so, what were the terms I would be prepared to accept for the transfer?



THE IRON SCROLL FEAT.

(FIG. 7.)

The scroll completed.

Schmidt and I conferred together on the question. Truth to tell, I had no desire to leave him. As I have told you, we were on the very best of terms, and my act was still drawing crowded houses every day. Again, I considered myself, although not bound down by any special contract, to be under a moral obligation, for it was to Schmidt that I owed my present prosperity. And this much I told him.

But my point of view, although he fully appreciated it, was not his. "One day you must leave me, Samson," said he, "and although I do not wish to lose you, nevertheless, in your light I do not wish to stand. Therefore, let us see what Director Debre will offer. If much more than you can be guaranteed here, which is very likely, then be wise and close on his offer."

So we sounded the representative of the Novi Circus, and found that he was empowered to offer much in excess of what I had been earning, huge though my salary had then seemed to me. And, as advised, I closed with his offer, agreeing to return with him to Paris at the end of the week. All settled, I wrote Miss Kitty, instructing her to come on with the dogs as soon as she was free, telling her all that had been decided.

In Paris I arrived on the 22nd day of October, 1923, and there appeared, as had been prophesied, with enormous success. But I did not stay at the Novi Circus long, for I soon found out that a great demand was growing for my services, and I was careful to sign up contracts accordingly. Too long at one place I did not allow myself to be bound down. My salary, I found, was mounting up with each fresh offer. And as long as I remained unfettered by contracts far ahead, there was every prospect of it mounting higher still.

Leaving my dogs in Paris with Miss Kitty, who, upon arriving there, had found no difficulty in obtaining bookings, I proceeded to Switzerland, then went on to Italy, working not in circuses now, but on the variety halls. Here I was when I received another letter which was to have an important bearing on my life. This letter, I must tell you, was from a music hall agent who was acting for me, one Spadoni, and the purport of it was this:

It appeared that when performing in Paris I had been seen by a certain Mr. Mitchell, a representative of Sir Oswald Stoll, who had reported to his chief so favourably concerning my show that an offer had been made to me to come to England and appear as a “top-liner” there on the music halls. And, knowing that one of my keenest desires was to visit England, Spadoni had closed on the offer. Therefore, there, almost immediately, I was to proceed, all necessary papers and tickets being enclosed.

CHAPTER II

SO to your country I came, alone, arriving at Victoria Station one Saturday night early in 1924. I could speak no English at the time except the one word “Coliseum,” that being the place at which I had understood from Spadoni that I should open. Out of the train at the terminus, I looked around for Mr. Mitchell, who, my agent had informed me, would be there to meet me and look after my wants. But no one who appeared to be looking for me could I see, although I walked up and down the platform and stood about for some time. Then, noticing my hesitation, one of the railway officials came up and interrogated me. But the kindly fellow might well have saved his breath, for, as I have said, the English language I did not then speak. All I could say in answer to his questioning was that one word “Coliseum.”

The official, finding out that I apparently wanted to go to the Coliseum – although I expect he wondered how I proposed to get in there at that time of night – escorted me outside and hailed a taxi. “Coliseum,” he said to the driver and, opening the door of the cab, motioned me to get in. And away I went, in my mind not at all as easy as I should have liked to have been. Where was this Mr. Mitchell? I was asking myself all

the time. But this was a question to which there was no one present able to give any answer.

After the cab had careered around several streets that I now know are not miles away from the music hall I wanted to find, the driver stopped the cab and, getting down, proceeded to do a little questioning on his own account – with, of course, no better result. Apparently thinking that it would be as well to ascertain whether I possessed the means to pay his fare, he pulled some money out of his pocket and signed to me to do the same. Ah, I thought to myself, he wants to see if I have money. Good! I will show him just how much I have got. And so, opening my bag, I took out bundles of German marks. Of which, I must tell you, I had twenty million – and have yet.

The disgust on the face of the taxi-driver, after he found out what they were, was comical to see. Evidently, he realised their true worth far better than I did. But I had other money, just five pounds (£5) in English sovereigns; and these, understanding correctly his thoughts, I showed him. How his eyes glistened when he saw them. At once his manner changed, and he ushered me back into the cab. So, once more off we went to this far-away Coliseum.

For it was ever such a long distance away from Victoria Station – at least, following the direction my cabman took. Miles and miles, it seemed to me, we went bowling merrily along. Quite true it is, I have found out since, that this fellow though that a long ride in his cab would do me good. For, now more familiar with your London, I know that he could have taken me to the Coliseum in less than a quarter of the time, if so to do he had wished.

However, at last the driver decided that it was about time to make the Coliseum, I suppose, and up to the hall he drew. Descending from his seat, “Coliseum,” he yelled at me. So out I got and had a look round, grasping firmly in my hand the bag in which reposed my believed colossal fortune, in company with one shirt and collar, some chains, and the serried nails on which, in my act, I was to lie.

But I was not to be allowed long to gaze about me, for the taxidriver indicated that the exact moment had arrived when he and my money were due to get more closely acquainted. Comprehending perfectly what he meant, although I could not understand his words, my five sovereigns I pulled out once more and showed on the palm of my hand. How much to give him, of course, I knew not, but he solved the difficulty by taking what he considered was his due – £4. Very good of him it was, don't you think, to let me keep any at all?

A good bit of business concluded, up in his seat once more the driver got, waved his hand to me and drove away – possibly back to Victoria Station, to see if there were any more like me knocking about. Left to myself, round the Coliseum I paced, looking about for the bills with my name on that I certainly expected to find. But not one did I see, for the very simple reason that there was none to be seen. Which, of course, puzzled me exceedingly. Perhaps the taxi-driver had brought me to the wrong place, I commenced to think. But, no, this could not be, I told myself after all. For he had

shouted “Coliseum” too loudly at me for there to be any mistake on that point.

I walked round the place and I banged at the doors, but, naturally, no one answered, as the hour was late. Rather, perhaps, I should say the hour was early, for it was the beginning of Sunday now. And while so engaged, up come a constable, which put tremors into me. Not able to speak the language, perhaps he might mistake me for a burglar, I thought. The ways of the English police I did not then know like I do now. Continental police, yes, these being so very much different.

The constable, though, did not think I was trying to break in. he could see that I was in trouble and he helped me out as best he could. Finding I could not speak English, he thought awhile, I, in the meantime, trying to make him understand that I was a performer expecting to appear at the Coliseum. At last he got some glimmering of what I was endeavouring to convey, whereupon he sized up the situation and acted in a very practical manner.

First of all, he ascertained that I had some money, I showing him my German marks – at the sight of which he smiled and shook his head – and the golden sovereign which the taxi-driver had been kind enough to leave me. Examining this, he hailed another taxi, and instructed the driver to take me to a place which I was to find out afterwards was the Regent Palace Hotel. I offered the driver the sovereign, thinking to save time. But the constable stepped in here, and evidently instructed the driver what to charge me, for I received back fifteen or sixteen shillings in change. Some of these I wanted to give the constable, but he smilingly declined and handed me into the cab.

So once more I set off, not knowing, of course, at the time, where I was going. My destination reached, the taxi-driver got down and wanted to take my bag into the hotel. But this, as politely as I could, I refused to let him do. In it, please do not forget, were, in addition to all my many, many German marks – thought by me then to represent a considerable amount of wealth – the implements, if it is right to call them that, of my profession.



THE IRON BAR BENDING FEAT.

(FIG. 1.)

Samson shows the bar in the straight. Naturally, here they could not make head nor tail of me. I was disconsolate. What to do for the best I knew not. Unable to make people understand me; apparently not to work at the Coliseum as I had been promised; very sorry indeed was I that I had ever left Italy on the advice of Spadoni. How I wished that I had him there to tell him all that was in my mind.

Exactly what I should have done I do not know if what seemed then to me a miracle had not happened. Who should come striding into the hotel but the Mr. Mitchell that I had expected to meet at Victoria Station. After introducing himself to me, he explained that the reason he had missed me was because he had been expecting to see a much bigger chap than I am – his recollection of me in Paris was that I was a much bigger man altogether – and in that mistaken assumption my arrival and subsequent departure

had passed unnoticed by him. It appeared then, failing to meet me at Victoria, he had gone on to the Coliseum and there run across the constable who had directed me to be taken to the hotel. From there on to discover me had proved an easy matter.

Well, that is how I came to London. Nothing very romantic about the happening, I will admit. You will say, perhaps, more comedy than anything else, and I myself have quite seen the funny side of it since. But at the time I most certainly could not. To be stranded in a strange country, unable to speak the language, is far from a pleasant experience, I can tell you. It is one I should not care to have to repeat, anyway.

From Mr. Mitchell I ascertained also that the reason why my name did not appear on the bills at the Coliseum was because it had been decided that I should not open there with my act after all. Hackney was the place where it had been arranged I should make my debut; and there it was I first made my bow to a London audience, the date of my opening as a strong man performer in England being February 4th, 1924. Mr. Mitchell, I have to tell you, lost no time in finding me an interpreter, one Ranefsky, a most accomplished linguist.

Although my show was quite an unpolished one, compared with the performance I give to-day, nevertheless, it proved an immediate success, the people of London receiving me with open arms, so to speak. This result pleased me greatly, as the first reception that a visitor gets usually decides the fate of his show. Previous to coming to England, I am now going to disclose, I had been told that the people of this country would not look at a strong show. No room at all was there on the halls here for an act of this description. I should show once, and then finish. That is what I was informed in Italy.

That my information was all at fault is shown by the fact that since my first appearance at Hackney in the February of 1924, I have worked regularly, week after week, until the February of this year, without having a single vacant date. In that month, though, an opportunity presented itself for me to rest for a week, and I gladly took it. For I had not only earned the rest, I think, but, moreover, I badly needed it. My show, being a perfectly genuine one, takes quite a lot out of me, as you can guess. Not that I am complaining, understand, nor do I wish to infer that it is proving too much for me. Not at all. But when working at concert pitch night after night, there is always a risk of going stale in a big feat. And, naturally, as one who takes a pride in the show I put on, I do not wish such a happening to occur. Not simply in fairness to myself, but just as much to those who engage me, and to those who come to witness what I do.

However, to return to the Hackney music hall! Well, here I continued to draw good houses all the week, each night getting more used to my new surroundings. For variety halls in England are managed quite differently from the way that they are abroad. This you may not know, perhaps, but it is just as I say.

From Hackney I went to Shepherd's Bush, then on to the Alhambra, where I got a wonderful reception. From London then I departed, visiting the provinces for three weeks to work Manchester, Bristol and Chatham, after which I returned to town again,

to fulfil engagements at the Coliseum, Chiswick and Clapham. A week at Leicester, and I was back once more, this time to stop for five weeks, during which period I appeared at the Willesden, Holborn, Kilburn, Ilford and Islington music halls, just in the order I have named, and at each with the most complete success.

Wherever I went, it was the same; a most cordial and encouraging reception was given me. Far from my act boring the people, it interested them so much that many of them came to see it not once, but two and three times a week, sure proof that there was something about the show which I was giving that was more stimulating than the ordinary variety attraction. And, of course, there was always the competition. Oh, I have just remembered that some of you possibly may not know all about this. I had better tell you about it, then, right away.

Well, before I came to England, I used to run competitions in France, Switzerland and Italy, the competitive feat being the attempted bending of a short iron bar from the straight into the shape of a magnet, the thickness of the bar being slightly less than half an inch. No one ever succeeded in bending this bar, I must tell you. And because it had stopped everyone on the Continent, I thought, that if ever I had to put a competition on the English halls, then the bar-bending test it would be.

As it so happened, I was asked to do so, and thus the barbending competition became a regular feature of my show, which, already popular and a certain draw, was probably added to in interest by this inclusion. For the competition brings quite a lot of humour into the performance at times, extracting many good laughs from the audience. Managers like this, for their patrons go away with pleasant recollections of what they have seen, satisfied in every way. This, naturally, makes for better business.

As soon as I was informed what prizes would be given by the people responsible for the staging of the competition, I knew we should get plenty of entrance, as there is nothing like a decent cash incentive to bring out budding talent. And so it proved. Knowledge that the man making the best show would have £5 paid out to him on the stage – and the two next best men £3 and £2 each respectively – flooded the stage with competitors wherever I appeared. No matter whether it has been England, Ireland, Scotland or Wales, up come the athletes of the vicinity and surrounding districts to try their strength and, if possible, annex the crackling currency. And some very amusing times these competitions have provided, I can tell you.

From Islington I travelled to St. Helens, then went on to Gloucester, where I met Joe Price, the gigantic weight-lifting blacksmith, a former champion of Great Britain, and a pupil of Mr. W.A. Pullum. Price, a splendid figure of a man, was extremely interested in my show, and after satisfying himself that my feats were genuine, was kind enough to make me some special nails for driving through the plank of wood, an item always included in my show. Then, from Gloucester, I went on to Portsmouth, where I had a very fine reception, sailors being notoriously good and boisterous sports. Edinburgh I called at next, then down to Sheffield and Leeds I came, returning after to London for a week, appearing at the New Cross Empire.

From town I went to Newport, then again to Scotland, showing this time at Glasgow, where are a great many strong men, some of them well-known weight-lifters. The Midlands I visited next, calling at Nottingham, London again claiming me the two following weeks, appearances being made at Stratford and Poplar, also hot-beds of strong men. Then across to Swansea I went, finding my act exceptionally well received here, following with visits to Wolverhampton, Birmingham and Dewsbury, the two former being very enthusiastic physical culture centres. Afterwards, I returned to London to fulfil two other engagements, showing at Finsbury Park and Penge, a call to Rotherham being fitted in between.

It was while appearing at Penge that I first became acquainted with Mr. Edward Aston, whose name was quite familiar to me as "Britain's Strongest Man." Aston's visit, I must tell you, was the outcome of the rumours which were then busily going around the country to the effect that I was a trickster pure and simple. I did not know what had prompted Aston's call at the time, not being informed as to reasons until later.

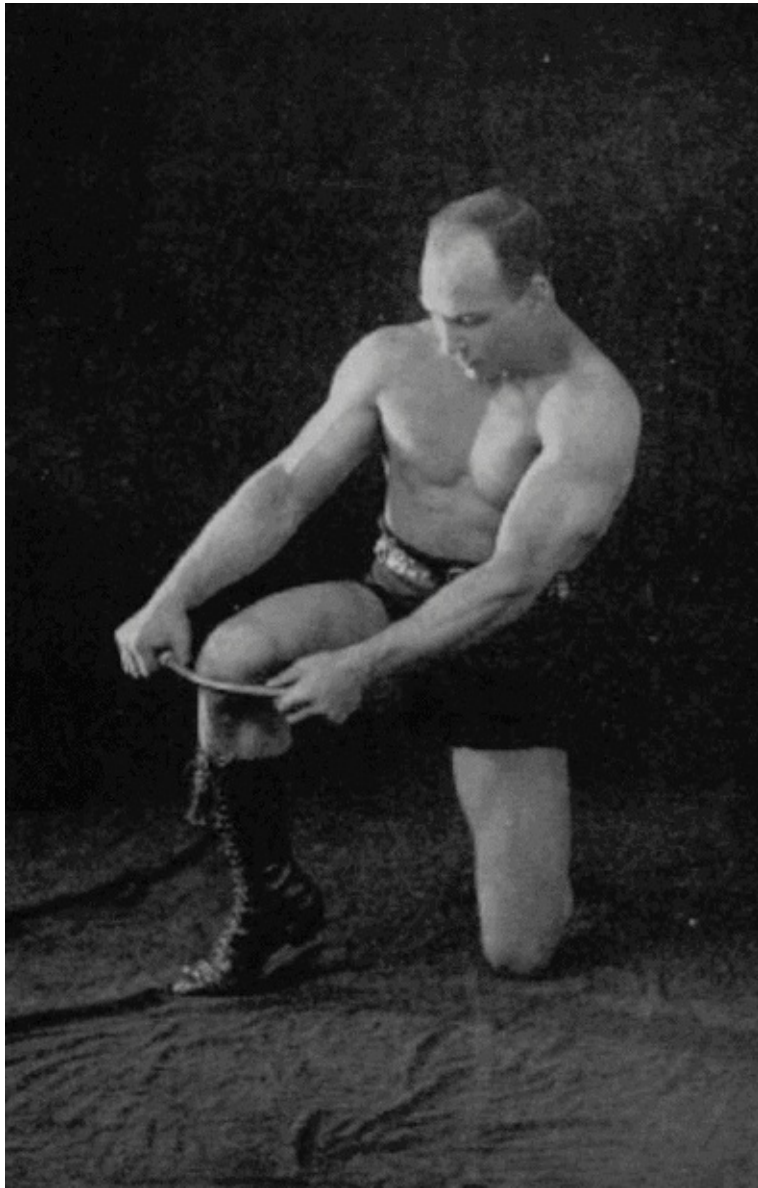
But what Mr. Aston saw with his own eyes, and tested with his own hands, convinced him that I was no trickster; as he left the stage that night holding a far different opinion from what he had when he came on. "You are a great fellow," were his words, "and you deserve every credit for what you do. Why, you are absolutely the most wonderful performer at this business that I have ever seen." Naturally, I felt very pleased to hear such an opinion from the lips of "Britain's Strongest Man." The Britisher is celebrated the world over as the greatest of all sportsmen. But this, knowing what others in the same profession had said and were saying about me, was praise much higher than I had ever expected to receive.

From Penge I went on to Newcastle and Hanley. Then back I came to the English capital, appearing at the South London and Edmonton music halls, showing to more than usually packed houses. And here, at the first, I received another pleasant surprise. One night a card came into my dressing-room inscribed: "W.A. Pullum, Editor, 'The Strong Man,' " and a pencilled note thereon requested the favour of an interview.

Now the name of Mr. W.A. Pullum I knew very well, having heard of him many years ago. He, all over the world, I have found, is recognised as the most remarkable weight-lifter that this country or any other has ever produced. Many there are, of course, who have lifted more than he has done, being much heavier men. But taken weight-for-weight, the only way in which true comparisons in weight-lifting feats can be made, it is universally admitted that no other man has ever come within even striking distance of his many phenomenal performances. And, of course, his fame as a teacher and trainer of numerous champions was known to me as well, and his several scientific and instructive writings also. Often I had wished that I could meet him.

So when I tell you that I was placed indeed to give Mr. Pullum an interview, you will, I feel sure, readily believe me. In he came, and after a polite greeting and hearty handshake, got right down to his business, which was a news feature for his paper. "I have just come along, Samson," said he, "to run the rule over you and your performances,

as my readers are asking for an inside line on your capabilities. So many conflicting reports have been circulated about these, that it is high time an authoritative statement was made, one way



THE IRON BAR BENDING FEAT.

(FIG. 2.)

Using the knee as a point of leverage, a “set” is put into the $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch square iron bar. or the other.”

First of all, Mr. Pullum had a look at my chains. “They certainly seem all right,” said he, “but then things are not always what they seem. Now, suppose I were to ask you to break this chain at this particular link by twisting it in your fingers, what would you say?” “Only that it would give me much pleasure to do this for you,” I replied. “Very well,” was his comment, “get right on with it, and try to forget that I am here.”

I did not quite know what he meant by this, and indeed all that he had said to me I could not follow, although I was both speaking and understanding English fairly well now, having made a study of the language ever since it was plain to me that I was due to stop a long time in this country. But what I did not understand my manager soon explained. The chain Mr. Pullum wanted to see me break, just where he had marked, but did not wish me to be flurried by his expert scrutiny. That was very kind and thoughtful of him, you will agree. But there was no need for him to fear for me on this account. To trickery I did not have to resort, so about nothing was there to worry.

So I took the chain in my hands and, in a few seconds, broke it in two, just at the link which Mr. Pullum had marked. "Well, it certainly does not seem to give you much trouble," said he, "so suppose you break one round your chest now for a change. Have you got one that you can spare for the demonstration?" "No," I replied. "I have only the one, and this I mend while I am resting between my two shows, uniting it once more after snapping it by replacing the broken link with a new one. See, I will do so now." And I showed him how I made the chain whole again, prior to bursting it around my chest during the second performance of the night.

"Will you let me hook it up around your chest?" said Mr. Pullum, after he had inspected each link of the chain closely. "Why, yes, of course," I answered, "do just whatever you think is necessary to satisfy yourself. I am quite agreeable to leave matters in your hands entirely, as you are here to test the genuineness of my performances." And with what I said my manager quite agreed also. It was best, he said, that Mr. Pullum should apply his own tests and name his own conditions.

So Mr. Pullum fastened the chain round my chest to his own liking, after which I broke it just as easily as I do every night on the stage. "Quite good," said he. "Now, if you don't mind, I will have a look at your iron bars." These inspected, he picked one out and tested it with a little file which he produced from one of his pockets. "This chap will do," said he. "Close it up now, and you can consider me quite satisfied that the feats selected are genuinely performed." So I did so, as quickly as I could, which visibly impressed Mr. Pullum. "That will do for to-night," said he. "If you wish to know what I think about it all, you will find my opinions in the next issue of *The Strong Man*." and what Mr. Pullum had to say about me in his paper pleased me very much to read.

Leaving London again, I went to Hull, Bradford, Southsea, and Watford, where I was interviewed quite a lot. Then back again I came, to work East Ham and Walthamstow, after which I went to Liverpool, prior to appearing at the Metropolitan music hall, London. From here I journeyed to Devonport, paid a return visit to Birmingham the following week, then went on to Edinburgh (where I saw the trainer mauled by the lions, at the Waverley Market Theatre, an incident I have referred to earlier on in my story), working Middlesbrough before coming back to London to fulfil an engagement at Poplar and a quick return date at the South London.

Thus, in a year, you will see that I have covered your country pretty well, although

there are a good many places yet where people would like to see me, I expect, and where I also would like to go. Still, this will all come in due course, I have no doubt, as my date book is steadily filling for many months ahead. Meanwhile, I will proceed to talk about things concerning which I think it distinctly advisable to speak.

CHAPTER III

I HAD not been in this country very long, though, working, before I found out that, while the public, as a whole, was quite prepared to accept me as a bona fide strength performer, the physical culture section of it – by that I mean those who practise physical exercise in some form or another – was rather apt to regard my feats with suspicion. My act, you see, was so entirely different from anything they had ever seen before, that they could not quite bring themselves to believe that what they were witnessing was not only new but a perfectly genuine performance. In justice to all concerned, perhaps I had better go over the ground in full. Then, explanations given, no possible cause for doubt can arise.

I will take my chain-breaking feats first of all! From what I can gather, years ago other performers there were appearing in England who did this kind of thing by trickery. Well, I am not surprised at that. Even on the Continent such devices are not unknown. But that does not prove sufficient cause for brief that I perform my feats the same way. My stage is always open to inspection, and whoever likes can come up and test my chains for themselves. My manager always asks for a committee from the audience to step up on the stage and give to my performance the closest possible inspection. Would this be done if I were resorting to trickery to accomplish these feats? I think not!

Then the iron bar which I bend are specially softened, I have heard it said, only those which are handed for test to competitors being as hard as the efforts of these men show the metal really to be. Specially softened are they, the ones I use? Then how is it when I have put a bend in the bar I use – which I pick haphazard from all that lie there for inspection – that no man has yet managed to bend it past the point where I purposely leave off for a second test to be made? No, those who may think that the bar I use is any different from all the others are quite off the track here. There is no difference in the strength of the bars. It is only in the hands that a difference in strength lies.

The feat of lying on the nails while a stone is placed upon my chest and struck with heavy hammers greatly puzzles people, for to explain it away I have had come back to me several curious versions. Some say that the nails are not sharp; others, that the stone is not heavy. Again, others say that I anoint my skin with some special preparation in order that I shall not feel the pain. Well, that there may be something in the last part of what is said, I will not deny. But anyone who really thinks that the nails are not sharp is advised to test them by lying thereon, while those who contend that the stone which is placed on me is not a heavy one, are asked to explain how long half a ton – which is what the stone usually weighs, approximately – has been considered light?

The feat in which I lie under a bridge over which a horse walks, followed by thirty or forty men – number only limited to those who are upon the stage at the time – is explained by the fact that at no moment does the bridge really rest upon my chest, owing to its peculiar construction. If this is so, then how do I manage to raise and lower it while the men are passing over? Actually, I do this by expanding and deflating my lungs, and thereby increasing and decreasing the height of my chest. If the bridge did not really rest on this part of my body, then whatever contortions I indulged in underneath it would not affect its positions, would it? Such a question answers itself.

The lifting of the girder in my teeth, it has been said, is only a trick. Well, perhaps it is. Anyway, it is such a perfectly simple one that anyone can see exactly how it is done. I just put the chain to which is attached the pad on to which my teeth bite round what I guess is the middle, then lift it off the ground with my hands to see if the guess is correct – and so to correct it, if it is not. Then I just lower it back to the floor, place the pad in my mouth, and stand up with the girder in my teeth. It is not very difficult, I will admit, as the girder never weighs more than 500 lbs. For all its simplicity, though, I have not yet come across any other man who can raise it as much as one inch from the floor.

The tug-of-war – as you call it here – is by some reckoned nothing very remarkable, as they say that there is nothing to resist against when two horses pull on the ropes which pass round the bend of my arms. Well, curious as it may sound, that I consider one of my best feats. It really is difficult at times, when, for instance, one horse is much more powerful than the other, as this makes the strain so very unequal. I have performed this feat with close on fifty men pulling – twenty-four each side, if I remember rightly – and, on several occasions, not one, but two horses pulling on either side. Still, why I think this a good feat and others do not, is, perhaps, because I am the one that has to perform it, while they simply play the part of lookerson. There is usually a distinction in the opinions of two such parties.

No, the real explanation of all the feats I do, and others that I am contemplating performing, is not trickery, but just a degree of physical strength which is quite unfamiliar in this country. Really, I do not blame people for being so sceptical, for it such strength as mine were common I should not be appearing on the halls here at a salary which runs into three figures weekly. But I do wish that people, before expressing such opinions, would take the trouble to satisfy themselves as to the accuracy of their statements. That they are interested cannot be denied, for to talk about anything shows that the attention has been attracted. Then, if interested, why not find out all that there is to know? especially when to find out is so easy. I am always willing to demonstrate exactly how I do my feats, anywhere and at any time; always willing to explain anything that may appear puzzling, so far as lies in my power.

It was principally because I discovered that the methods by which anyone can become very much stronger than they are were not nearly so well known in this country as they should be – and as I always believed that they were until I came here and travelled about – that I finally consented to put my own particular system of exercise into a

form which would enable anyone to practise it who so desired. This system, a totally different one from any before propounded, is taught by post and, I am very pleased to be able to say, being practised with great success by people all over the world. It was only at the end of November, 1924, that announcements concerning its public presentation were first made. Yet, so soon, I have hundreds of accomplished and delighted pupils.

Before ceasing to talk about my system, I should like to say that the information that English physical culturists would be glad to know more about my methods was first conveyed to me by Mr. Edward Aston, who, in addition to being a world's champion weight-lifter, also is a Physical Culture Expert of international repute. When, partly by questioning me, partly by relying on his own powers of observation, he discovered that my methods were different from those usually employed, he was most emphatic in assuring me that, in this country, these self-same methods would be very quickly adopted if only they were made more widely known.

I thought over the advisability of teaching as well as performing for some time, and was still considering the matter, when Mr. W.A. Pullum, during another interview, spoke on the subject in a very similar manner. This decided me. "Very well," I said. "I will make my system public as soon as ever it can be done, as you seem to be so certain that it will be much appreciated." and when I tell you that, less than three weeks after, pupils were enrolling under me for instruction, you will realise that I lost no time in making good my word.

And now, perhaps, having heard so much about me, you may care to hear something that I have to say concerning the possibilities of others becoming strong, as this is one of the questions I am always having put to me, no matter where I go.

To become as strong as I am is, truth to tell, not possible for everybody, and I am going to tell you why. In the first place, to become so strong it is necessary to have that ambition right from childhood. And everyone has not that ambition. Therefore, without it, they cannot hope to reach where I have reached. For strength such as I possess does not come by chance. It has to be striven for very, very strenuously, in a most determined way.

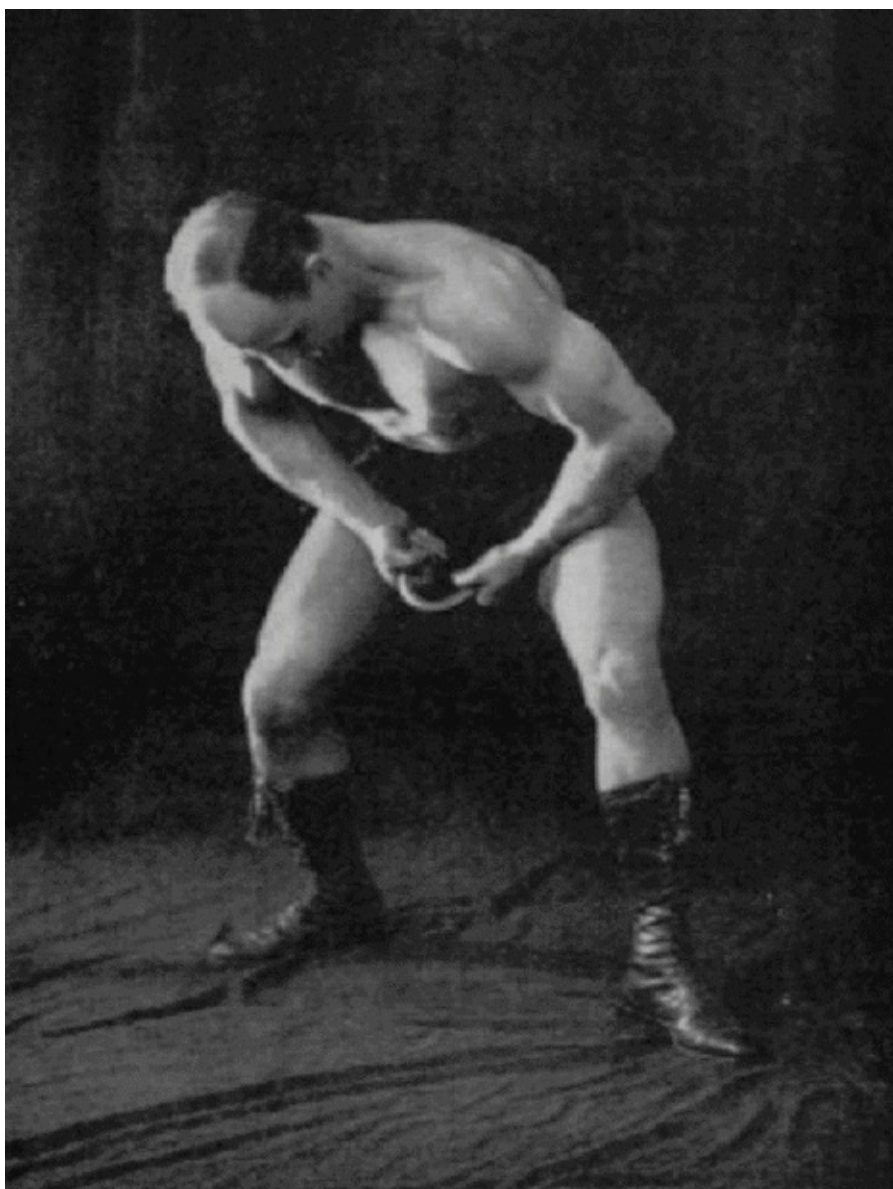
But, possessing that ambition, while everybody may not become exactly the same as I have become, yet the way is easily open for strength to be gained far above the average. It means patience and perseverance, and often many disappointments, for nothing really worth while is ever gained very easily. If it were otherwise, then what would be gained would not be valued – would not be considered worth while treasuring. And one cannot place the power of the body in a list of this kind, for physical strength and continued good health are the most valuable of all worth-while possessions.

I cannot say myself that before I began to study the development of strength in the body, I ever suffered from ill-health, as, fortunately, I did not. But in my travels I have met many who have so suffered, yet, by the practice of physical culture, have rid

themselves of such an afflicted state. Cases of this description on the Continent are quite common, and in this country, too, I have encountered many such, the most notable being a gentleman of whom previously I have spoken, this being Mr. W. A. Pullum. He, I have learned, was once consumptive, so certified to be by English doctors. You have only to know this and then consider that he is to-day, and has been for many years, recognised as the strongest man of his weight in the world, to realise that ill-health can be banished by the man who is thoroughly determined to become strong.

The strength of the body, in many instances, is largely the cause of the strength of the mind, if you can understand my putting it that way. Will-power decides what the muscles shall do, forcing them to accomplish great tasks, or allowing them to give up, according to the strength of mind displayed. If you have a strong will, you can become physically strong, there is no doubt about that. To what extent, of course, no one can really say. It all depends on how you work to gain strength, and how long you are prepared to continue with that work.

As I told you at the beginning of my story, I am now thirtyseven years of age, a time when men were once considered to be approaching that period of life when the physical powers would be on the decline. But my powers are not declining, although I put such a severe tax on them, night after night, with only a week-end rest intervening. On the contrary, I find they are still steadily increasing; and I expect them to continue to increase till I am well past forty years of age. I may be wrong, of course, in believing this. But with the experience to hand that I have, I can assure you that I do not think so.



THE IRON BAR BENDING FEAT.

(FIG. 3.)

Taking up a position where the powerful muscles of his chest assist him, Samson proceeds to close the ends of the bar.

Although fairly strong as a boy and a youth, I really do not believe that I should have ever possessed the strength which has made me such a notability had I not practised long and earnestly in the way I have attempted to outline. I was never satisfied to rest content; always was I trying to do something more – to go one better still. Of course, I never had the idea really, I will admit, of becoming the strongest man in the world, for the world is a very big place, and at the time I started, my understanding of its size was nothing like it is to-day, the result of extensive travelling. But I always wanted to be a little stronger than the many strong men I came into contact with from time to time. And that, although I did not realise it then, perhaps approached somewhere near the same thing.

In my opinion, the possibilities of becoming strong by the regular practice of physical exercises are not realised so well as they should be by the people of this country. You are a nation of sportsmen, it is conceded; but in thousands and thousands of cases, you only play the part of lookers-on, instead of taking part in physical exertion yourselves. On the Continent, things are so very much different. Athletic festivals, in which many thousands of women as well as men take part, are a regular feature of the national life. Over here, you seem to regard bodily culture more as a hobby than as a duty, which it really is. Consequently, when you see a man whose physical strength is far above the average, you look upon him as a rarity.

If the people of England were only to study the physical culture question more, not only would the national health standard be benefited considerably, but they would have solved the problem, I think, of their continued defeats at the hands of athletes of other nations. This, I gather from reading your newspapers, is a sore point with those who take a great interest in athletic matters. Well, in return for all the many kindnesses showered on me since I landed on these shores, I here – even at the risk of being thought too presumptuous and too critical – am trying to show you the way that your athletes can regain their lost international laurels.

It is a proud boast of yours, I know, that Great Britain has taught the world how to play the game of athletic sports and pastimes, and I am quite prepared to admit that this is true. But when the pupil becomes better than the master, then the master should not be too proud to learn those things from the pupil which alone have permitted him to become better. Look at your boxers, for example! Once upon a time, with the sole exception of Americans, perhaps, Britishers were the only people who had made both a science and a sport of the art of selfdefence. Yet, to-day, there is scarcely a country that has not produced a man who can hold his own with any of your best, at any weight. And, in too many instances, more than hold his own. Yes, I think you will be well advised to listen to what Samson has to say.

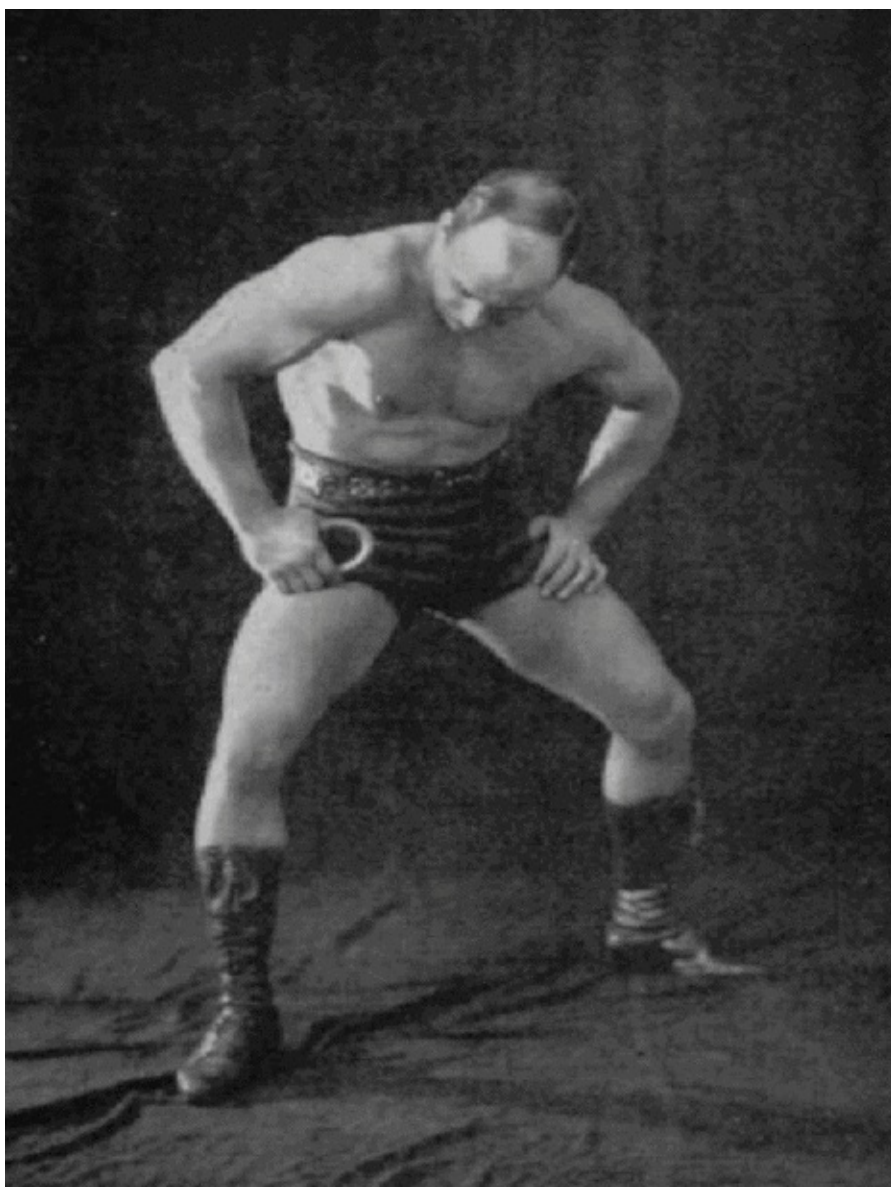
The reason why the Continental boxers so consistently score at the expense of their British opponents is not because they know more about the game (this could hardly be so), or because they are more courageous. Agreed, I hear you say, and you are right. No, the explanation is quite a different one. Briefly, they are usually fitter a very much stronger men. Not strong into the sense that you regard me, perhaps, able to break chains, bend iron bars, and all that sort of thing. But, despite their inability to do these feats, so far as their own sport is concerned they are strong men in every sense of the word. Their bodies are attuned to take more punishment than your men can take. Their fists are capable of more forcibly administering it. Consequently, all other things being equal, there can only be one outcome of such a state of affairs. And what that outcome is, you know.

One of the ideas that your boxing people have in their heads is that, if they become strong, they will become slow as well, this having been said to me many times. I smile, for the idea is entirely wrong, and only the result of ignorance in physical matters. Would you call Jack Dempsey slow, or Georges Carpentier? Yet these men are

strong! Could you have called Georges Hackenschmidt slow, or the great Georg Lurich? I think not! Yet these men were strong, very strong; not only as wrestlers, but as weight-lifters, as many of you who read these lines will probably know as well as I do.

To gain strength there is no need to sacrifice speed if the sport you follow calls for quickness in your actions. It simply means that you should train in a way that your muscles will act quickly instead of slowly. In some sports, a certain degree of steadiness in motion is very necessary; in others, speed alone is the thing that counts. Well, knowing this, you train accordingly. If your sport requires that you shall move fast, then you will have to develop that power which is called energy, as this is the motive force which compels the muscles to speed-up in their actions. If you need to work more slowly, then it is probable that you will also have to work longer. In such cases, it is to the development of stamina, then, that you have to pay more attention, as this is the force which sustains the organic and muscular mechanism of the body, when each is called upon to work hard over a lengthy period.

To train yourself to become as strong as I have shown myself to be, may, as I have said before, not prove possible. But to train yourself to become at least twice as strong as you are, and would otherwise remain, is quite a simple matter, if you only go about it the right way, taking advantage of the experience of others who have shown that it can be done. General advice on how to do this I will now take upon myself to give, not because I wish to force my methods and my knowledge upon anyone, but rather, because I believe that any such information that I can give will be readily welcomed.



THE IRON BAR BENDING FEAT.

(FIG. 4.)

Again assuming a position where his great strength can be used to the best advantage, Samson brings the ends of the bar together.

CHAPTER IV

BEFORE anyone can become really strong, it is necessary that all the organs of the body should be healthy and vigorous, so that they will regularly fulfil the functions for which they have been created. This, although it should be obvious, everyone does not apparently realise, which is one result – and a bad one, I must say – of not receiving correct instruction in the fundamental laws of health and strength.

The reason why I point this out so early is chiefly because, during my tour of England, I have met so many physical culturists who are working on the wrong lines. They are

very keen to become strong, but, unless they alter their methods of training, they will never reach to the height at which they are aiming to climb. To put it plainly, they have started at the wrong end. They are striving to secure strength, when it is their health that should be receiving their attention.

Many of these men have been led to believe that by exercising with barbells and dumb-bells they could very quickly become strong. If they were fit to start this kind of thing, then I should have nothing to say against the method, for weight-lifting is certainly a very excellent way of obtaining strength, providing you are scientifically instructed.

But the trouble is, I have found from experience, that only a proportion of these men have been so instructed, and these men, so they have told me, are the pupils of Mr. W. A. Pullum, which only confirmed what I had already suspected. You see, this branch of physical culture cannot be learned at all well unless under the direct supervision of an expert, as it is too highly technical. But any man fortunate enough to secure the right instruction may look forward with confidence to gaining a high degree of strength and a useful muscular development. But, however skilful may be the instruction, it is not only useless, but distinctly unwise, to go in for weight-lifting unless one is thoroughly fit.

The principal reason why I am right against weight-lifting being practised except under the supervision of a fully qualified man is not so much because I believe that with it there are distinct dangers of straining (for any sensible person will always know how to avoid such things happening), as because I know that indiscriminate practice with barbells and dumb-bells results in such a waste of energy. Particularly am I referring to that kind of instruction which advises men to continue practice until they are tired, this being the worst advice, in my opinion, that it is possible to tender.

The great secret of developing strength is to do so in a way which will store up energy instead of dissipating it, and build up the stamina as well; and the only method I know which really does this is exercise against very strong resistance. What are described as “free movements” will not do it, excellent though such movements may be for purposes of stimulating the circulation, increasing the power of the lungs, and making easy the movements of the joints. But fitness is not great strength! It is simply the point at which the start towards great strength is made.

The method that I advocate is the one I follow myself. As my pupils know, my system of exercise is one based entirely on this principle of resistance. Of course, I know that stretching rubber strands and pulling out steel developers is one way of working this principle, but this is not the kind of thing that I mean. The resistance that I am referring to is of the kind that my chains furnish – which, as I show nightly, can, in various ways, be successfully overcome.

As you may have gathered from a remark or two made earlier on, I am a firm believer in gradual progression, not in rushing at a difficult task right away. Man has thirty years or so of life in which to improve his physical powers if he so wishes, so where is

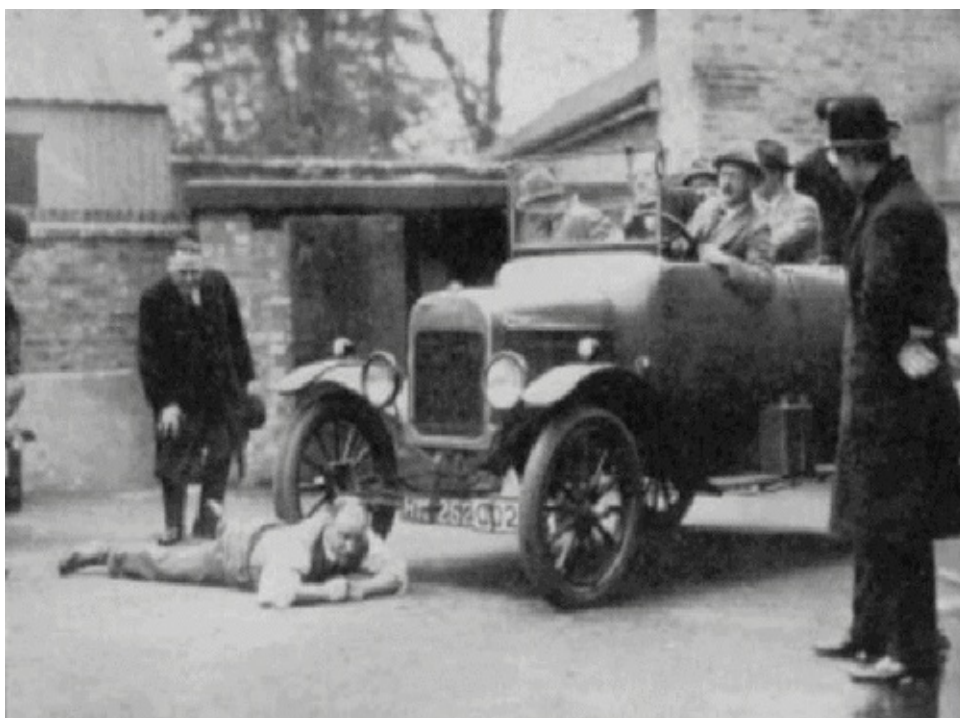
the need to hurry? Remembering this, there is none. Besides, if attempts to hurry matters are made, physical set-backs in the way of strains and twists are invited. This means that period of complete rest have to be observed, which in turn means that the rate of advancement is delayed accordingly. No, in the matter of building up strength, it is most distinctly advisable to proceed slowly at all times, progress, ultimately, being found to run out much the quicker this way.

So far as eating and drinking are concerned, I should not care to lay down any specific rules, or offer any advice, unless it is that which bids one always to use one's own discretion. Myself, I am, at times, a very big eater. At others, I find my appetite nowhere so enormous. This varies as much as anything else by reason of what I do. If I put in an extremely hard week, but do not get as much sleep as I should like, then I find I need more to eat. If, on the other hand, I get the amount of sleep that I know I require, then I always notice that the cravings of the appetite are less. I am a great believer in sleep, I must tell you. It is the finest energiser I know.

Then as to the right time to exercise and the advisability of cold baths – questions which I have had fired at me any amount of times! Well, the hour at which you exercise, and the time you take over that exercise, depends a lot on what you hope to gain by it. If you are merely aiming to keep fit, then a few minutes every morning soon after you get up should prove sufficient to invigorate the body for the coming work of the day. On the other hand, if as well as fitness you are striving after greater muscular development, then you need to combine an evening table of exercise with the schedule of the morning. This can be anything from fifteen to thirty minutes in duration, according to the extent of your ambitions and your capabilities.

Cold baths I do not recommend for everyone, as in many cases the reaction they set up is far too severe, and likely to do more harm than good. If cold water is found to stimulate, though, try it first with sponge and shower before immersing the whole body suddenly by a plunge. It is just as necessary, and just as easy, to work up to the desired end by stages in bathing as it is in strenuous exercises, or feats of strength. Gradual progression should be the rule to follow – first, last, and all the time.

Well, you now know almost as much about my life as I actually do myself, and with my ideas concerning the development of physical strength also you are familiar. So far as my feats go, I would have said more, perhaps, but as Mr. W. A. Pullum has very kindly consented to describe them in full, and also comment on my methods as he has found them, I do not think that there is any more for me to say except to add how deeply appreciative I am of the way you have received me in your country, a generosity of spirit which I hope you will accord my attempt to interest you as an author.



SAMSON'S

LATEST FEAT.

Allowing a motor-car and passengers to run over him. Note. – There are only six of the latter in this car, but he has been known to sustain the weight of twice that number.

THE AMAZING SAMSON

SIDELIGHTS ON HIS FEATS AND METHODS BY W.A. PULLUM

Editor of "The Strong Man" and Principal of the World-famous Camberwell Weight-lifting Club

IN all my long experience of strong men I can honestly say that I have never yet met one more modest or more genuine than the herculean prodigy whose extremely interesting life story comprises the major topic of this book. That he is what I have described him to be most people who have seen his performance will admit, I think, without cavil. And those who may have previously entertained any doubt on that score will admit it also, I am inclined to believe, after reading what an ingrained sense of equity alone impels me to say.

When Alexander Zass – or Samson, to use the name by which he is more commonly known – first presented his performance over here, the general public, although not very well versed in matters of this kind, quite realised, however, that here was a man most decidedly out of the ordinary, even in this particular line of business. That this is so, I know from the many comments made to me at the time and since; comments which most will recognise were bound to be made, whether I invited them or not, by reason of my known association with such men and matters.

But although, as I say, the general public was inclined to accept Samson at the valuation which his music hall agents had placed upon him, the majority of people who take more than a passing interest in such things were most positively not so inclined. His feats were so astounding – the tasks he set himself each night were so formidable – that they speedily arrived at the conclusion that different explanations from those advanced were the real and logical answer. In other words, they said that Samson was a “fake.”

Now, although I do not, for one moment, wish to pose as an individual possessed of omniscient powers, I must say that I never regarded Samson as such. Admittedly, the claims made on his behalf were tall. But, then, it was not the first time that similar claims had been made on behalf of others, yet found, upon expert and impartial scrutiny, to be fully justified. Here, it should be stated, I am thinking of Maxick and the late Arthur Saxon, men to whom I have devoted some space in another part of this book, each being, in his own particular sphere, every whit as remarkable.

Saxon and Maxick were, of course, weight-lifters, whereas Samson is not – or, at least, he makes no pretensions to be one – which, to some extent, explains why his uncanny powers were doubted. The physical culture community of this country, you see, have, over the course of a good many years, been educated up to that point where weight-lifting performances, whatever their magnitude, leave them unperturbed and unimpressed. If they are interested sufficiently to move in circles where the authenticity of the feats in question can be easily verified, the mere fact of their moving in such circles tends to develop a state of mind totally devoid of excitement or surprise. If, on the other hand, they are not on such familiar terms with the men who accomplish these things, and the conditions under which accomplishment is made, their state of mind is very much the same, for they usually do not believe them. Or, again, if they are generous enough to accept without question the performance of the feats brought to their notice, their sheer inability to visualise what such a performance means in terms of physical power leaves them quite as undisturbed as before.

Here, though, they had something entirely different! Right into the heart of the metropolis had come a man purporting to do things which common sense alone would tell anybody simply could not be done. Could not, that is to say, without the resources of legerdemain were conjured up – without the artifices of the trickster were employed to the fullest degree of their capacity. At least, so said those people who flattered themselves that they knew all there was to know about the strong man business.

The thing which made Samson suspect was his stature; or, perhaps, it would be more correct to say, his lack of it. For, compared with some of the giants who have visited us in days gone by, he is, despite the massive appearance that some of his photographs are apt to give him, quite a little man, standing somewhere about 5 feet 5 inches, and weighing only a pound or so over 11 stone. Had he been an enormous fellow, whatever he did would probably have been accepted without dispute. That is my opinion, anyway, and the reason for that opinion is this:

Size, although the wise know it to be no criterion of strength, is, nevertheless, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, not only accepted as ample evidence of it, but is looked for in just so many cases. If a man says he is strong, and he happens to be a big fellow, then all that he may subsequently say or do is usually accepted without even a lift of the eyebrows. But let him be anything different from this bolstered up, erroneous ideal, and immediately his powers, however genuine they are, become suspect. It has proved so many times in my own particular case until I have gone out of my way to supply proof indisputable. And so, in like manner, it proved with Samson.

It was some time, I must confess, before I took it upon myself to subject this remarkable performer to the acid test, for, on most occasions when I was at liberty to do so, he was not appearing in London, and when he was, my time was fully occupied in other directions. However, at last we came to grips. One night I went along to the South London music hall and saw his show from the front. Candidly speaking, I could see little wrong with it, although I paid particular attention to those things which previous experience told me should have devoted to them that amount and quality of attention. Naturally, I realised that, if any trickery was going on, the front of the house was not the easiest place from which to detect it, so I determined, if it were at all possible, to have him give me a demonstration at very much closer quarters.

Obviously, the place to put him under a physical cross-examination was his dressing-room, as there comparative quietude could be expected, and there, also, opportunities for any trickery would not so easily present themselves. Of course, if I had been invited to make this examination, I should have chosen a different venue altogether, preferably my own club. But as the initiative was my own entirely, I simply had to make the best use of the facilities which the prevailing circumstances presented. I had no difficulty whatever in securing an interview, and no excuses were proffered when I suggested that certain feats should be essayed there and then. This reception, I may say, although it impressed me most favourably, did not cause me to slacken the keenness of my supervision, nor did it lessen in any way its thoroughness. While admitting that I was no scoffing sceptic, at the same time I was no adulating believer. I was there with a perfectly open mind, content to be convinced by my investigations, one way or the other.

Now, one of the feats which Samson does – one that has never before been attempted by any other man in the business – is the breaking of a stout chain with his fingers. Several have been the explanations put forward to account for this remarkable performance, some of which I propose here to set down as evidence of the ingenuity with which he has been credited. Strength, it will be noted, is conspicuous by its absence from these proffered explanations.

The first, and perhaps the most feasible, is the one which says that in the chain is a link which has previously received the attention of a hack-saw or a file. Next is the one which says that the part of the chain where the break occurs has been specially treated with acid. And, finally, following somewhat similar lines of reasoning, is the one that

says that the link broken has been cleverly interposed in a determined place, having previously been softened by heating, or some other efficacious process. But what about the fact that Samson always asks the committee that sit on the stage which link they would like broken? Oh, that is explained away by the assertion that always included in that committee are men who are in his employment, these men choosing the place where the chain shall be broken.

So much for the alleged duplicity of this feat! Now for what my investigations conclusively proved.

The chain produced by request, I had a good look at it, inspecting very minutely every link which went to make it up, these being four in number. There were other lengths of this particular type of chain on hand, I ascertained later, as Samson carries quite a stock of it about. This particular piece, however, he assured me, was part of the chain he had used in the first house. Recalling that he had been asked to break the fifth link then, I asked for the other half of the chain to be produced. This, without any demur, was done. Certainly, this also only numbered four links; and, further, to one end of it was still attached part of a broken link. This was satisfactory, so far as it went, for I had noted that the chain, before being broken, numbered nine links, these being told off audibly by his manager, one by one, for the benefit of the audience and the committee.

As soon as I had finished my inspection, I handed the chain back to Samson and instructed him to proceed, which, without any hesitation – or any hurry, for that matter – he did, calmly twisting away until the chain actually broke under my eyes. This is no mere figure of speech, as the whole performance was carried out practically cheek by jowl. And as I followed his movements, the secret of this astounding feat immediately revealed itself to me. Samson is ingenious right enough – if not in the way that so many have alleged. Not only is he a man of extraordinary physical powers, but he is a thinker as well. I will explain!

The chain that Samson uses for this particular feat is not one of common construction. That is to say, about the links of which it is composed there is a peculiarity of shape. These are, near enough, $\frac{1}{8}$ inch thick and 2 inches in length, each link comprising a double loop, so formed by the ends being crossed and turned over in the middle. This long, crossed link fulfils two purposes: First, it gives him a sufficiency of material for his fingers to grip; secondly, it makes a break in its centre practically certain if only sufficient leverage at each end of it can be exerted.

Once he has secured the link chosen for attack in a way that will not allow it to turn round, Samson, by twisting the link each side of it in opposite directions, subjects it to a strain which causes it to break. Sometimes it takes him, he said, about a minute to do this; others, he is successful in less than half that time. It all depends on the strength of the metal, which seldom runs out twice alike. In this particular instance, he accomplished it in about 30 seconds; on another occasion, to which I am referring later, he accomplished the feat in 22 seconds exactly. I personally timed him.

Satisfied completely that this chain-breaking feat was perfectly genuine – for the link is broken, understand, not merely opened, as some have thought – I suggested that there was no time like the present to give me a demonstration of the chain-snapping round the chest feat. For that the chain is snapped as distinct from broken I was convinced by the way that it sprang forward from his body when it parted under the strain to which he subjected it in the first house. And, as was proved subsequently, I was right.

The chain which Samson produced I examined quite as closely and as carefully as I previously had the other, and I had to confess that, so far as I could see, there was nothing at all wrong with it. Most decidedly there were no saw cuts in any of the links, nor were there evidences of a file having been used, explanations which had been freely offered to account for its sensational snapping. The chain was untampered with, so far as these alleged ulterior methods are concerned, in any way. But you will note that there is a qualification. Samson's fingers had been at work on it before I took it into my hands for inspection, and in a most interesting way.

I thought, at first, that for this feat he would use a different chain – or a different piece of chain – from that which I had seen him break on the stage. But, no, he quite candidly informed me that he replaced the burst link with another; and, to my great astonishment, he suited the action to the word. Showing me where the chain had broken before and been united, he took a pair of pliers and opened the link so replaced, substituting another from a fresh piece of chain of the same calibre. This, in itself, was a feat of strength every bit as remarkable as the former twisting and breaking of the other chain, for the grip of his fingers on one end of the link was obviously just as powerful as that put on the other by the pliers. Otherwise, it would not have been possible for him to open the link. And if I had not witnessed this fresh instance of phenomenal fingers' strength, I have no qualms in admitting that I should have found difficulty in believing it possible. I have had this self-same chain tested since, you see, with pliers and a vice. Take it from me that, even then, it was not at all easy to open.

The chain made good once more, I asked Samson if he had any objections to my fastening it round his chest, to which he replied that he had none at all. Therefore, I did so, taking particular care to see that it was linked together in such a way which would mean a whole lot of trouble to open it if any tricks were due to be played. But nothing of the kind was necessary, if seemed, for with a mighty effort this wonderful fellow forced it apart a few seconds after I had so securely linked it round his massive chest. That I was satisfied I had to confess; there was nothing else to do. But I have not finished! I have yet to tell you exactly how this feat is done.

As I mentioned earlier, Samson bursts the chain that encircles his chest not by a breakage of links, but by opening one of them by the pull exerted as a result of the expansion of his chest and back. To do this, he so links the chain that the hook which is attached to one end grapples the link where connection is made in such a way that, providing sufficient strain is placed upon that part, it will open. This strain he puts out, first by filling the lungs with as much air as they will take in, then by broadening the

back. Something has got to go when he does this: the expansion of his chest and back muscles is terrific. It is a very impressive piece of work, and one, he says, which he practised a very long time before he could always make sure of essaying it without fear of failure. That he must have put in a lot of practice I can well believe. The calloused condition of the latissimus dorsi muscles, discernible even in photographs, proves this.

I had a look at his bars next, of which he keeps quite a quantity on hand, these being required for the competition that he runs, a very popular feature, as the prize money is genuinely distributed, not handed out on the stage to be returned in the dress-room, an item which helped to kill the wrestling exhibitions on the halls years ago. Three men share £10 between them, the winner taking £5, the others £3 and £2 each, according to the order in which they finish. The winner, I may say, is the man who succeeds in bending one of these bars the most. No one, Samson tells me, has ever succeeded in closing one of these bars completely with the exception of himself. More often than not, competitors fail to put even the slightest semblance of a bend in the iron.

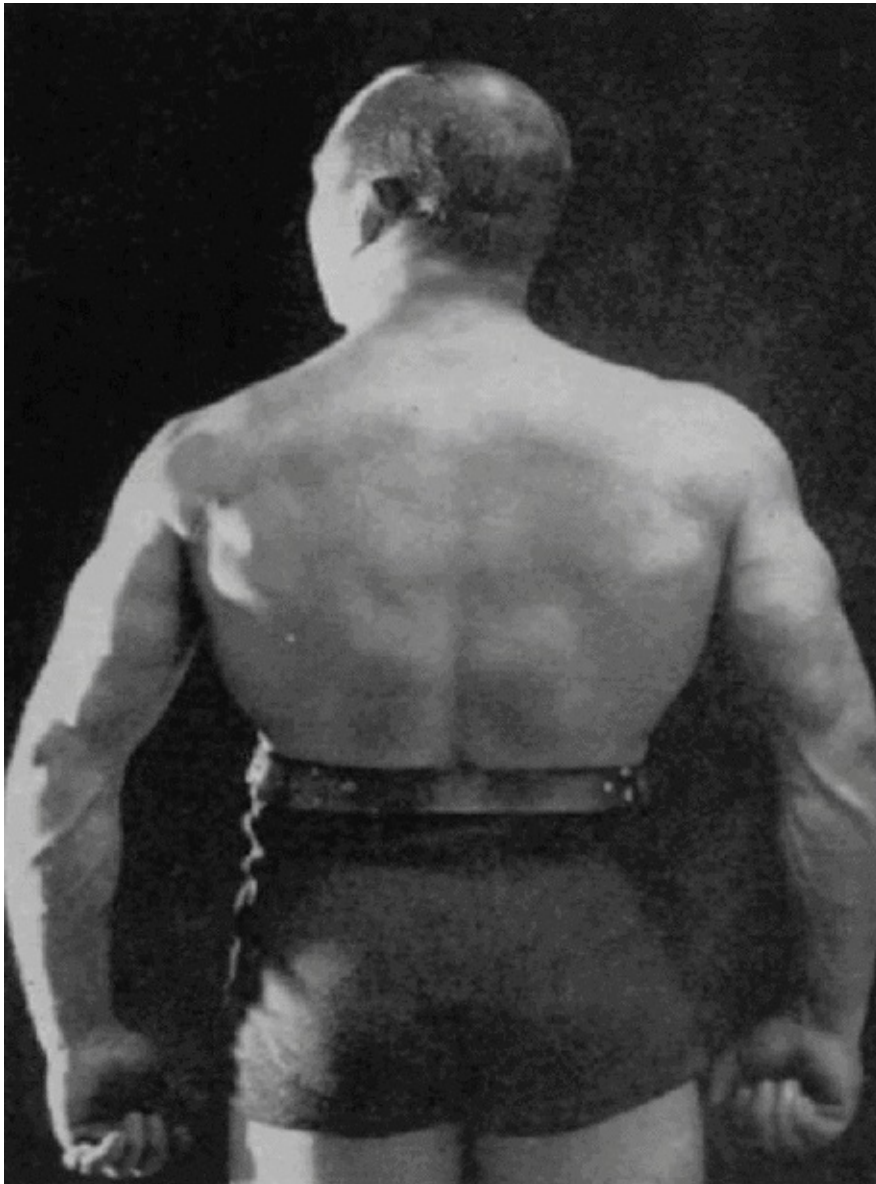
After testing these bars with a file that I had brought specially for the purpose, I picked out one that seemed to be exceptionally hard. None were what could accurately be called soft, it may be just as well to set down, but the specimen selected was unquestionably harder than the remainder. This I asked him to shut up for my benefit, which he did with no trouble at all. As a matter of fact, he closed it, point to point, in far less time than he takes on the stage. Upon my commenting upon this, also on the hardness of this particular piece, he had something interesting to say.

These short bars – their length is 12 inches, usually – Samson informed me, vary greatly in the resistance they offer, even when they all come off one rod. Sometimes three or four will be found to be extremely hard and really difficult to bend – difficult for himself, he meant, and impossible for other people – the remainder being quite soft. Occasionally, he gets hold of one of the latter kind, which he uses discreetly. When competitors are fortunate enough to pick them, then, if they are at all strong, they make a good show. But not otherwise.

Concerning the question of the difference in time between his stage and dressing-room performances, Samson said this: If he bent the bar too quickly, then people would think that it was most certainly soft, and just as easy as it looked. But by taking a fair amount of time over the feat, the audience appreciate it more. Therefore, although he could, figuratively speaking, close any of the bars he uses, hard or soft, in the twinkling of an eye, he does not do so, taking his time instead, and thereby gaining plenty of applause for what appears to be a strenuous tussle. In this attitude he is wise. Samson is not only a genuine performer, but a showman as well, a combination seldom encountered.

Thus finished my first meeting with Samson, and I came away perfectly satisfied that his chain-breaking and bar-bending feats were above suspicion in every respect. On that score no one need entertain the slightest doubt. The man is a phenomenon at this

kind of work. And when one has said that, one has said all.



SAMSON POSES TO SHOW A POWERFUL BACK AND
BREADTH OF SHOULDER.

Note. – The marks where the chain cut in before being snapped can quite plainly be seen.

Some little time after, Samson, fulfilling a promise made that night, came along to my school at Camberwell, and gave a further exhibition of his powers before myself and a few friends whom I had invited specially for purposes of conviction. This time he lifted an enormous weight with his teeth – one of my barbells, weighing about 400 lbs. – and knocked a pair of 5 inch nails through a 3-inch plank of wood without any protective covering on his hands at all. This naildriving feat is worthy of a little description, especially as it is one around which grave doubts circle. Therefore, I propose to give that description now.

The idea exists, and strongly, too, that Samson does not drive the nails he uses through the plank, as he would have you believe, the real explanation being that holes are made previously and then filled up with putty so cleverly as to baffle detection. Well, all I can say is, that if such a degree of cleverness has been reached, Samson is not the man profiting by it. For in my presence, he has not only driven nails through a 3-inch plank supplied by me by a series of thumps with the open hand, but he has also pushed them through with the unprotected hand, steadily and surely. Further to that, he has hammered them back again with a piece of wood, then, extracted both by using the forefinger only, hooking it round the protruding 2 inches and pulling just as effectively as if his finger were a pair of pincers. Finally, I have seen him straighten one of the nails that, encountering a knot, had bent right over as he attempted to drive it through the plank. To do this, he just placed his forefinger against the nail, pressed without any perceptible display of force, and it stood upright. There is no denying that these things are done, incredible as they may seem. They are done; and done genuinely. To condemn these things as fakes just because they are unique is only to ignore all the evidence that exists to prove conclusively to the contrary.

Before closing on this nail-driving performance, it may interest many to know that his ability to push the spikes home, as distinct from driving them, is only of comparatively recent development. One night, the blow, not being as true as usual, deflected the nail, the head of which rather badly tore his hand, causing a wound that, for some time, gave him quite a deal of trouble, as it became septic. But unwilling to cut the feat out of his show (from the point of view of securing applause, it is one of his best), the idea struck him that he might be able to push the nail through by steady, bearing-down pressure just as well as he could drive it home by hammering – and, of course, without running the same risk. He tried, and, after a time, proved successful. To-day the feat he learned under the spur of adversity forms a permanent part of his act.

Another feat which Samson performed on the occasion of his semi-private visit to the Camberwell weight-lifting Club was to duplicate a very impressive piece of work which I have, now and again, seen him include in his act, this being the transformation of a straight iron rod – 6 feet long, 1 inch wide and 3/8 inch thick – into a most artistic series of bends and scrolls. Again looking for an explanation other than the true one, people have said that this is not so difficult as it may appear, for the simple reason that the iron is soft, the bar being of a quality specially chosen. Well, anyone who really believes this is advised to scrap the idea right away. There is nothing special about the iron that Samson uses for this feat. But there is about the way he does it! That, though, very few have apparently discovered.

This particular iron bar-bending performance is a master-piece of cleverly thought out movements – proving, as I said before, that Samson uses his grey tissue as well as his muscular fibres. The first time I saw it done, I must confess that all that there is to know about it was not quite so clear as was the case after I had seen it repeated. What I saw done on each occasion – for the method of performance does not vary – I will now endeavour to explain.

The bar is first balanced on the base of the forefinger of one hand, its exact centre being thus accurately ascertained. This found, round it at the point a handkerchief is wrapped, whereupon Samson places it in his mouth and bends it to the shape of a right angle by the simple expedient of pressing down on it with each arm simultaneously, this pressure not being exerted steadily, as might be thought, but most violently. The teeth, of course, do not come into actual contact with the metal, as they bite on this only through the handkerchief. Still, that notwithstanding, it is a pretty tough piece of work, all the same.

Bent to the angle described, Samson now fashions a pair of handles on the bar in the following ingenious way:

Placing one half of the bar on the floor, on this he kneels with the right leg towards the end, placing his left foot as near as possible to the bend in the centre, bringing the knee of this leg to rest against the middle of the upright half, the end of which he bends over his left forearm by forcing against it with his right hand, the head being brought in to assist. The end thus bent, the movement is continued by pulling towards the body with the same hand, this pulling movement being kept up till an elliptical loop has been formed. This accomplished, he turns the bar round, and treats the other end in the same way.

Holds for his hands thus manufactured, he then proceeds to put a coil in the middle. This he does by standing up, placing the iron on end with his left foot against it at the bottom, and pulling the right hand loop towards the left, which is rested against his left knee. Brought to this point, he forces each end outwards until the bar is again in a straight line. The end of this maneuver witnesses the appearance of a circular bend in the middle.

The procedure which obtained this result is continued, but along somewhat different lines. Placing his hands one at each end, he rests the looped centre on the top of his thigh, and thrusts downwards until once again the iron each side is parallel – or almost so. This done, he takes up a kneeling position and, by an inward forcing movement, passes the ends by one another once more, completing the fresh bend started by thrusting the ends downward as before while the coiled centre rests on top of his thigh. On occasions, he will manufacture coils in triplicate, using similar methods of leverage to those just described. The first time he visited the C.W.L.C. was one of these occasions, this also witnessing the bending of the short iron rod in 22 seconds, a feat referred to earlier on.

We now come to a most remarkable feat – the one where, his body entirely unprotected, he lies on the points of hundreds of nails and allows a heavy stone to be hammered on his chest. This, I admit, does require a lot of explanation. Several, naturally, have been advanced, and before going any further it may be interesting to set them all down and examine them.

First, it is said that Samson does not lie on the nails at all, a broad leather belt which he wears round his waist being so manipulated that this protects his body from contact

with the points. Utterly foolish! The belt that he wears round his waist could not be shifted that distance up the body, owing to the appreciable difference between his waist and chest measurements, the latter of which immediately arises for consideration, as it is the broad part of his back, and not the loins, where resistance to the nails is principally offered.

Then there are those who say that the nails are not sharp, also that the stone is not heavy. Well, if the points of the nails are blunt, they have only become so through Samson lying on them so often, while so far as the stone is concerned, it is a well known fact that different people have entirely different ideas as to what really constitutes a heavy weight. Some would call an ordinary “fifty-sixer” heavy – others are so framed and muscled that they could juggle with it. But I have yet to meet the man who regards half a ton as a weight of negligible poundage. That is to say, a man who comes into lifting contact with such a weight, minus the aid of a crane. For half a ton is what Samson has sustained on his chest, to my knowledge, lying on those nails meanwhile. And if there should be any who consider the testimony I can offer insufficient – well, plenty more can be had for the asking.

When I first saw Samson perform this feat (at the South London Music Hall), I estimated the weight of the stone he was then using to be somewhere in the neighbourhood of six and seven cwt., and that I considered a fairly heavy weight to have resting on the anatomy, with nothing softer underneath the said anatomy than the points of four or five hundred nails. The hammering to which the stone is subjected, candidly speaking, did not impress me. This, anyone who thinks at all will immediately realise, is scarcely felt on top of a stone of such weight and dimensions. It looks good, of course, which is why the item is included. But apart from its spectacular effect, there is little in it.



A SOLID BLOCK OF GRANITE, WEIGHING CLOSE ON 1/2 TON, IS PLACED ON SAMSON'S CHEST, THERE TO BE STRUCK REPEATEDLY BY TWO MEN USING SLEDGE HAMMERS.

(Note the bed of spikes on which Samson is reclining)

Certainly it should not be allowed to obscure the real point, which is:

How does Samson prevent his ribs being injured by the weight of the stone; also, how is it that the flesh is not even punctured by this extremely forceful contact with the nails?

So far as the extent to which my investigations have carried me, I can only say that Samson's ability to resist the dead weight pressure of the stone on his body is largely due to power and strength gained by the continual execution of another feat, this being that in which he allows a horse to walk over him, followed by two or three dozen men, a description of which feat I will pass to later. That the weight of the stone on his chest inconveniences him one little bit, I absolutely decline to believe, after what I have seen him sustain in the other big feat just mentioned. But the nails! Ah, that I agree is something of a more puzzling character.

From what Samson has told me, he has always been equipped with a very stout epidermis. As a child, his skin became toughened as a result of long exposure to the air, for in that part of Russia where he lived and worked, it was the rule rather than the exception for the youngsters to toil in the fields practically devoid of clothing. Then, it must be remembered, his circus life and his years as a wrestler would tend to harden him considerably. All these things have had a cumulative effect towards toughening his skin.

Samson, of course, is not the only man able to repose comfortably on a bed of nails – or, at least, appear so to repose. Instances are fairly common in India of fakirs doing this sort of thing, although, it must be confessed, I cannot recall where any have added to the ordeal by having weights placed on their body. In Samson's case, I should say it is largely the result of calculated practice, following upon the discovery that his skin was harder than most people's. One thing there is in addition, which it may be only right to mention, and that is that he uses a special embrocation of his own – a compound which, I am told, contains, among other things, nascent oxygen. That it is an extremely efficacious preparation I am prepared to believe, as quite a few people known to me personally have benefited by its use, in certain cases, rheumatism having been chased away after attacks of long duration.

We now arrive at the feat which I consider has some bearing on his ability to sustain the block of granite on his chest without any seeming difficulty or discomfort, this being his sensational bridge feat. The explanation given to me of this, before I had seen the feat performed, was that the secret was the manner in which the bridge is constructed, this being so devised that, at no time, did its weight, or the weight of anything passing over it, rest on his chest, as he would have people believe.

Well, I thought that there might be something in this explanation, as the individuals responsible for it were by no means greenhorns at the strong man business themselves. So I decided that, the first opportunity I got, I would have a careful look at this particular part of Samson's performance.

The opportunity came sooner than I expected. Business taking me in the neighbourhood of Portsmouth, I found Samson was working at Southsea, so I made up my mind to go along and see what was going. The first thing I ascertained was that, this week, he was using a piece of granite weighing just over half a ton for the bed of nails feat (I had the the weight verified, so am quite sure on this point), a poundage which rather surprised me till I was told that this lump of stone was the only thing that it had been possible to secure in the town at all like what was required. Naturally, it will be understood, I expect, that the stone for this feat Samson does not carry about with him all over the country. Showing at different halls each week, he just picks one up from a local mason. And this time, he had picked up one almost big enough to make a monument.

Well, I had a good look at this bridge – the chief reason for my visit – and found it to be a pretty substantial affair, exactly the same in principle as a door-hinge. That is to say, whilst it could be shut up – as it is when packed for travelling – it presents two inclined planes, butting almost one against the other in the middle, when it is opened out with the ends resting on the ground. But that, when so opened, it would sustain any appreciable weight without collapsing, I soon discovered was not the fact. The only thing which prevents the bridge from collapsing is the performer underneath it. It rests on his chest all the time, he in turn lying on a box arrangement the height of his knees, this being sometimes cushioned, and sometimes not.

To prove to me that he takes all the weight on his chest, Samson, when the twenty-five men who had congregated on the stage that night were passing over, lifted the whole lot (bridge and men) up a couple of inches by the simple process of expanding his chest. This wonderful feat impressed me considerably, and I advised him to make a regular practice of this performance, as it would thus enable anyone to see that the whole weight was in contact with his body all the time. Since then, I understand, he has followed this advice. As a result, less has been heard than before that Samson, for the successful execution of the bridge feat, relies on the aid of the carpenter. The wonderful power of his lungs, and the extraordinary strength of his ribs, are now much better realised, it seems.

The feat in which he successfully resists the pull of two horses, tugging in opposite directions, is not discredited so much as it is apt to be somewhat belittled, being considered a rather tame performance compared with some of the others which I have described. Samson, however, is inclined to rate this feat as one of the most difficult that he performs. The strain on the frame, when two big horses pull spiritedly, is something terrific, he assures me, a statement that can be easily believed. Forty men pulling (twenty each side), he says, although, at times, they prove a little more difficult to control, do not subject him to such a gruelling ordeal. Fifty men is the greatest

number whose efforts he has successfully resisted in this tug-of-war feat, a really superhuman performance. But this number I venture to suggest would prove too much for him if the feat were essayed on the grass. As it is, performed on the stage, the men cannot get a stable foot-hold, although the boards are, previously, sanded quite liberally. Still, this is a very wonderful performance, all the same.

For the benefit of any who may not have seen this feat, I will describe briefly how Samson does it. First, he tackles two heavy carthorses, the animals pulling on two ropes passed round the crook of his arms, he gripping a loop of the same material to furnish a fixed point of resistance. Sometimes the horses slip, although the stage is sanded. Then the man manifests his power in a spectacular manner. For, with a supreme effort, he pulls the horse again on to its feet. Further, by allying himself with the pull of first one horse, then the other, he drags them alternately across the stage. Following the horses, the men come on, pitting their pulling power against him likewise. This is usually the last feat of his act.

The abnormal strength of his neck and jaws I have seen him demonstrate in three ways. The most commonly performed of these is the lifting of a heavy steel girder in his teeth, its weight being anything between 350 and 500 lbs. And even the latter figures, colossal though



SAMSON'S

WONDERFUL BRIDGE FEAT.

In which he demonstrates the remarkable resisting power of his mighty chest. the poundage, do not represent his limit. One night, just prior to the rise of the curtain, he lifted a girder weighing about 300 lbs. with a 10 stone man selected on each end.

The second feat is staged quite differently. Samson, hanging suspended from the “flies” by a rope looped round one his ankles, holds in his teeth a leather “gag” to which is attached an apparatus in which three men seat themselves. Once in, and the strain taken, Samson spins the whole lot round and round with his hands until a fair rate of speed has been worked up. An impressive feat, but one not quite so good as the girder, as the latter has to be lifted, whereas the aggregate weight of the three men and the seating apparatus has to be supported only – a distinction with a decided difference.

But the greatest feat of all is the last; one which he usually performs out of doors for reasons which will soon be self-evident. Again two horses are called in, their services being utilised this time in the following manner:

Into a large cart about a score of men enter, all destined to have a ride under rather novel conditions. For Samson, attaching his teethgag to the traces of the two horses, allows the animals to pull the loaded cart a hundred yards or so. When the horses make their initial strain to get the lot on the move, Samson steadies the gag with one hand as he braces one foot against the front of the cart in order to establish a point of resistance. But as soon as the horses have got going, he takes his hand away immediately, and all the strain is on his teeth, jaws and neck. It is a most remarkable feat, and has to be seen to be appreciated, its performance in the main streets of various towns where he has been appearing, never failing to cause a considerable stir. This is one feat, it may be said, concerning the genuineness of which no doubts have ever been expressed. Wonderment it has excited in plenty, of course, and understandably so. But at that it begins and ends.

Such are the feats of Alexander Zass – truly described as “The Amazing Samson.” Now to have a glance at his methods, which are as interesting as the man himself.

Question as to how he obtained his phenomenal strength, Samson made no attempt to conceal that this is only the result of the intelligent and determined practice of physical culture. Constitutionally strong from the beginning, admittedly, he has studied long and worked hard in order to increase the natural powers with which he started off. And, over the years, patience and perseverance allied have brought a full reward.

For orthodox methods, Samson has little or no use. That is to say, he does not believe in free movements and the like (exercises without apparatus) as methods calculated to obtain great strength. For the purpose of bringing the body to that degree where it is capable of fulfilling efficiently the tasks set for it by the routine of everyday life,



PULLING ON A SPECIAL, LEATHER "GRIP," HELD BY SAMSON WITH HIS TEETH, TWO HORSES DRAW A HEAVY LOAD THROUGH A PUBLIC THOROUGHFARE. he agrees that free exercises are admirable. But, beyond that, he is

distinctly disinclined to go.

Concerning weight-lifting he expresses opinions equally as definite. That it makes a man slow, binds or toughens his muscles unduly, or cramps the range of movement of the joints, he ridicules absolutely. Also, he smiles at the idea which still prevails – though only among the misinformed – that those who practise this particular branch of athletics are booked for strained hearts and ruptures. His attitude on these points can be justified. I think I can safely say that I have had as much experience as anybody in and with this work. Yet, never have I come across an authenticated case of any of the foregoing inimical results accruing from the practice of scientific weigh-lifting. Several previously sceptical medicos, it may be said in passing, I have convinced otherwise, as well as hundreds of laymen. But those things belong to another story.

Samson, who could, if he so desired, put up some startling weight-lifting performances, does not include this kind of strength demonstration in his show for the simple reason that those who engage him do not desire him to do so. This point he very clearly emphasized. At present, he is an artiste, booked to provide an entertainment which his agents now know the public will be pleased to see. If, at any time, the public wishes to see him lift weights, then he will do so. But, until that time, he will carry on with the act which is rapidly becoming so familiar. Meanwhile, in preparation for such a contingency arising, he is practising weight-lifting, on sound

lines, under my direction. And already, it can be said despite the fact that his tuition has been of the briefest, he has accomplished much.

The methods to which this remarkable man pins his faith are what can only be described as resistance exercises of a most novel character. By such methods, he claims – and by such methods only – the very best results, from a great strength point of view, are obtained. He is a great believer in the principle of conserving energy as opposed to wasting it. And in the methods he has adopted and perfected, he firmly believes that he has discovered a unique way of gaining the highest possible degree of physical strength in the shortest possible time.

For reasons which will be perfectly obvious, I am not privileged to disclose Samson's methods in detail. But no harm can be done by stating that his system takes the form of a series of movements which bring in the use of chains, these being of different length and strength, according to the nature of the exercise with which they are included. The idea is certainly novel, and teems with distinct possibilities. For, if Samson can do so much by the employment of these methods, once they become more generally known, there is no reason to suppose that others cannot improve themselves physically to an extent hitherto considered impossible.

The keystone of the Samson system is the development of the strength of the tendons – the connecting link between bone and muscle. As anyone the least bit familiar with anatomy knows, the various movements of which the body is capable are simply the result of muscular contractions acting on the bones of the skeleton. If the connection between bone and muscle is weak or underdeveloped, then, obviously, the maximum amount of power which the muscle contains cannot be effectively transmitted. In other words, strong tendons spell full physical power; weak tendons spell less.

The theory is not a new one! Arthur Saxon always claimed that a strong man's first consideration should be the development of his tendons, the cult of muscle only being an item of secondary importance. I also, long ago, recognised the logic of this argument; and, during my career as an active performer, concentrated all my energies on developing, to maximum degree of power, that important part of the anatomy. The fact that I have been able to accomplish certain feats, although a man of but very light weight (8 stone 10 lbs.), which have proved beyond the compass of so many bigger men. Other things, of course, have contributed, it would be idle to deny. But in the strength of what has been described as my “steel tendons” lies the chief secret of my numerous record feats.

But while the theory selected and so successfully exploited by Samson is, as I have shown, by no means a new one, one has to admit that this manner of application is decidedly original. Saxon developed the strength of his tendons by the lifting and supporting of weights; and I, in proportionate degree, did the same. Samson, however, has not followed these lines, but has struck out on others quite dissimilar. No one, so far as my knowledge goes, has worked at all like the way he does. His ideas, and the method of their employment, are entirely his own. And because they are, he is fully

entitled to all the credit likely to accrue as a result of their extensive adoption.

At various intervals during the past few decades, as I have chronicled in another part of this book, outstanding figures have arisen and favoured us with exhibitions of their phenomenal powers. First, Sandow, with an inspiring message to all humanity, showing by his own superb physique and radiant health that most bodily ills can be positively cured by the joint exercise of mind and muscle. Next, Samson, a natural strong man, the like of whom, as a weight-lifter pure and simple, we had never seen before, have not seen since, and probably never will again. Then, wonderful little Maxick, pioneer of a new physical art, whose muscular control was a revelation as startling as the physical power which went with it. And, now, Alexander Zass, a man of many parts, many accomplishments, whose strength, as genuine as it is unassumingly displayed, fully justifies at least the first part of the title which has been universally accorded him: "The Amazing Samson – The World's Strongest Man."

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